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LECTURES

PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

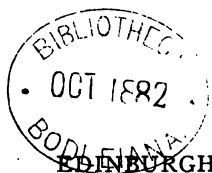


REV. R. V. DUNSTON

LECTURES
ON
ST. PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE TO
THE THESSALONIANS
CHAPTERS I.-IV.

*DELIVERED IN HOLY TRINITY CHURCH
SCARBOROUGH,*

BY THE LATE
REV. R. V. DUNLOP, VICAR.



EDINBURGH
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1882

*To the Congregations worshipping at Bishopwearmouth
Parish Church, and at Holy Trinity Church, Scarborough,
this Little Book—the last Bible Readings of one who loved them
well—is Dedicated, in grateful remembrance of the affection
shown to the Author.*

THE following Lectures were among the last works of their writer before he was called to his rest. They are published as left by him, when, after delivery, he from memory wrote them down; and lack of record makes it impossible to acknowledge any sources to which he may have been indebted. Those who heard these Bible Readings will regret, in their present form, the loss of that finish which marked them when given; and will miss too the charm lent to them by the gentle and persuasive manner of the speaker. They are, however, sent forth with the feeling that, even in their incomplete state, they will be welcomed by all in whose hearts the memory of him who penned them is still cherished, and that perhaps they may prove useful to others under whose notice they now, for the first time, come.

J. H. A. S.

Easter, 1882.

Lecture I.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ."—1 THESS. i. 1.

READERS of the Koran will hardly call it an interesting book. It is very tedious. There is a great deal of chaff, very little wheat; and, what little there is, is taken from the Scriptures. Now the Bible, besides being God's revealed will, is in the very form in which it is put interesting. Men do not think so, and some would probably feel they had but a dull companion, were they left alone any time with the Bible. But when we have felt first our need of it, and then its value, we find that not only has God told us His will therein, but that He has used the most interesting ways in so doing. Interesting history, touching biography, sublime poetry, and the matchless tale of the Gospels are followed by a series of letters dwelling on, and expanding Christian doctrine, written by real men, to real men, who put the truth in a taking form. St. Paul was the great letter-writer. "His letters are weighty." They are a living power yet, for he wrote as he was "moved by the Holy Ghost." The Epistles to the Thessalonians are doubly interesting. They are the earliest of his letters which have been preserved. He may have written some before, for the caution

given (2 Thess. iii. 17) as to the genuine mark of his letters may imply not only that he had already begun his literary work, but that forgers were even now in the field. However this may be, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians is the earliest of his writings which we possess, and it is perhaps the oldest Christian document in existence. As you are aware, the Epistles are arranged in our Testament not according to their date or their importance, but according to their bulk or length, and hence the position of the one now open before us. On it we propose to dwell. May God the Holy Ghost give His help, and make the study profitable.

To-day our remarks must be introductory, and we shall notice the *Writer of this letter*, and *Its Address*.

I. THE WRITER.

Three names indeed head the letter. Paul mentions the names of Silvanus and Timotheus as with him and joining in the messages, but ii. 18; iii. 5; iv. 9; and v. 22; show who the real writer is. The two other names are those of the Apostle's fellow-labourers in Thessalonica. Silvanus, or Silas, had (as Acts xvi. tells us) been St. Paul's fellow-sufferer in Philippi; and Timothy had, as this Epistle testifies, done work among the Thessalonians. They could bear testimony to the Apostle's feelings, and could, and did join in his prayers and praises. Paul was the writer.

You will observe that he takes no official title. When writing to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Timothy, and Titus, he describes

himself and gives weight to his utterances as an Apostle. In these two Epistles, and in that to the Philippians and Philemon, he writes as the loving friend whose words have full weight in themselves. They loved him. He loved them as a nursing-mother loves her child. He had led them to the Lord Jesus, and his word as their spiritual father was enough.

The writer writes as one who had come among them and made their acquaintance. They had till a short time before known nothing of each other; but he had been led to them by God's Providence, and had formed what was indeed an "eternal friendship." He had come too not only by God's permission: he had come to them on a heavenly-appointed mission. The "man of Macedonia" of whose appearance in a vision we read in Acts xvi. 9, had included the dominions of Philip of Macedon in the sphere where "help" was wanted, and Paul assuredly gathering that he was wanted there, had come to find his convictions true.

The writer had come to them a sufferer. He had been shamefully entreated at Philippi—scourged by the lictors—and with the terrible wounds unhealed had reached Thessalonica. He came with much bodily weakness, and found a famine raging there. Lewin tells us that at the time of his visit bread was six times its usual price. Paul had little or no money, no friends, and an aching body. He had to work at his trade. It was a business which required no great skill, the making tents of goats' hair. He got a lodging in the house of a Jew, who had changed his name Joshua into Jason, and there Paul carried on his labours.

He had to work hard for little pay ; and through interruptions in preaching and teaching the Gospel his labours had to be carried into the night. The readers of his letters knew him as one who worked "night and day" (1 Thess. ii. 9), and but for help from Philippi he would have fared very badly.

Still the writer in spite of all had won their hearts. He had touched the right chord, and they had learned to love him as he to love them. Very tender is this Epistle. Nowhere else does the loving nature of him who once breathed out "threatenings and slaughter" show itself more fully.

One word about the place where it was written. At the end of the letter you will see it said that it was "written from Athens." This is not true. This subscription is a human addition, and you will find something like it at the end of every Epistle ; such additions are no part of the Word of God. This Epistle was written from Corinth.

II. Let us now look at the ADDRESS of this letter.

It is addressed to Thessalonica. There is no difficulty in finding the place. On your maps (which pray consult, for it will make this letter so much more real to see the place where its first readers lived) you will find it about one hundred miles south-west of Philippi. You will see that it is a seaport, and therefore likely to be of importance, a seat of commerce ; and (as it was pierced by the great public road, the *Via Egnatia*) so it was. It was formerly called Therma. But its new designation was derived from a sister of Alexander the

Great, after whom it was named by her husband Cassander when he rebuilt Therma, which was pleasing to him partly on account of its situation, and partly because of some warm springs he found there. It had grown rapidly, and when Paul came there he found it the city chosen by the Romans as the metropolis of Achaia, a "free" city, and enjoying many privileges. Its importance long continued. In Christian times—the third century—it was known as 'the Orthodox City.' In A.D. 1430 the Turks took it, and after four hundred and fifty years of Turkish bondage it still subsists in Salonica. It was the scene of some rather notorious riots four or five years ago. The walls round it are said to be five miles in extent; and now the Jewish population is variously estimated at one-third to one-half of the whole.

The parties addressed, however, are not *all* the citizens of Thessalonica. Paul writes "to the church which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." *The Church*. It is in this word that St. Paul salutes the Christians of Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia. The other Epistles are addressed to "saints," and one title throws light upon the other. No better definition can be given of the word Church than that supplied by our own Prayer Book, "the blessed company of all faithful people," all the believers, both lay and cleric, both ordinary Christians and those who labour among them and are over them in the "Lord."

But as the word Church means "*called out*," we shall be able further by the help of Acts xvii. to find out

who composed the Church. First of all there were "the Jews." These Paul reached in their own synagogue. Then (Acts xvii. 4) we read of "devout Greeks." It has been supposed by some commentators (who adopt a possible reading) that these words really represent two classes. The word "devout" applying to the proselytes, persons in the city seeking truth who had attached themselves to the Jews; and "Greeks" applying to the open heathen, for in 1 Thess. i. 9 Paul writes of some who had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Of these there were "a great multitude," and the Epistle shows they formed the greater part of the Church. Then there were "chief women not a few," probably the class we should now call 'ladies.' If so, the Church comprised all ranks. The Greeks were, many of them, of the labouring classes, for the Apostle (1 Thess. iv. 11) bids them "do your own business," and "work with your own hands." Ye see their calling, Brethren. Not many rich, not many wise, not many noble were called, and they formed the Church.

How were they called? They were called by Paul's preaching. We learn from Acts xvii. 1, 2, that when St. Paul reached Thessalonica he found what he had not seen for some time, "a synagogue of the Jews," or rather *the* synagogue, that one well known to all around. There he went. It was his custom, just as it had been his Master's (St. Luke iv. 16), to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and there he addressed the Jews. Notwithstanding their treatment of him in Antioch in Pisidia, and his avowed

purpose there (Acts xiii. 46), that since they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, he would turn to the Gentiles, he still obeyed his Lord's command and offered the Gospel "to the Jew first." He addressed them "out of the Scriptures." He found them expecting a Messiah, and he confirmed their expectations. They looked for a King, the King of Whom the prophets spoke, and Paul showed them how well founded their hopes were. Nay, he told them the King had come. He preached (so his foes said) "another King, one Jesus" (Acts xvii. 7), and he told them that God had called them to "His kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. ii. 12). To those same prophecies he pointed them while he told them of the life and death of the Lord Jesus. He had to show them that the Christ must needs have suffered. Ps. xxii. and Isa. liii. would here be his text, and fortified by these and many like portions of Scripture, in the conferences he held he affirmed with power that the Lord Jesus Whom he preached was the Christ (Acts xvii. 3). Candid souls among them yielded to the truth, and some among them believed, and openly taking the side of Paul and Silas joined God's Church. The news spread beyond the synagogue. The multitude of Gentiles heard of the tidings and came thirsting for more. In the synagogue and in Paul's humble lodging they listened to what is now the "old, old story," then a new doctrine, and they received and believed. They in due time were called; by God's grace they obeyed the calling; they became part of the Church.

The Church here called out was *called out suddenly*.

The term of St. Paul's personal ministry was short, "three sabbath days" (Acts xvii. 2). Add a week at each end, and say that he was there four weeks, and you probably make the stay as long as it was. How much was done in that time! Vast hopes given up! Past courses abandoned! A new life given to a multitude! Prayers for pardon going up from lips unused to form such words, and pardon and peace bestowed through the blood of Christ! What a profitable four weeks' ministry! What a bold people, so ready to come out and call themselves the Lord's! Sudden conversions are very old things. They were witnessed in Thessalonica where the gulf seemed deeper and wider than we see it in nominally Christian countries now. That gulf was crossed, crossed suddenly, and as it was then, so it is now.

Then we see the Church, so effectually and suddenly called out, left without its human founder. Unbelieving Jews, "moved with envy" at the power St. Paul wielded over the minds of their heathen fellow-citizens, stirred up the idle and vicious hangers-on at the market and other places, and made an uproar. Paul's lodging was surrounded and assaulted. He by God's Providence was absent; but Jason was dragged before the Roman authorities and charged with harbouring men who preached treason against the Empire and Emperor by preaching "another King, one Jesus." No doubt the inoffensiveness of the accused was known, and the real nature of the preaching understood; but it was a serious charge to lay against any man, and the authorities were "troubled when they heard these

things." To entertain the charge would be to punish the innocent; to dismiss it would be to make themselves obnoxious to their Imperial Master. Hoping for calmer times they adopted a middle course. They took security for the appearance of Jason and his friends at a future time, and let them go. This showed that Paul ought not to stay where he was. He must go on to "help" all that country, and therefore the "brethren" immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to the secluded city of Berea (Acts xvii. 5-10). Thus their first teachers were taken from them, and without their aid the Thessalonian converts had to work on and hold on. They did this too under trying circumstances. They had to endure persecutions, and many of them. But they had "patience and faith in all" their "persecutions and tribulations" which they endured (2 Thess. i. 4).

How weak was this Church! The shepherd away, the flock would surely be scattered! But the Shepherd was not away. He was still there, and would make amends for Paul's absence. Paul knew this, and he shows the secret of the Church's strength. The "Church" was in "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." How strong! On the rock! Not only Jewish envy and Roman despotism would fail to hurt it, but the very gates of hell could not prevail against it. In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ there lies our safety too. Orthodoxy will not save us. Ordinances will not save us. Nothing short of being in Him.

God grant that we may have this mark of a true Church, to be "found in Him." Then we are safe.

Lecture II.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."—I THESS. i. 1.

HAVING seen who was the writer of this Epistle, and identified those to whom it was addressed, our next task should be to find out the object the writer had in view. We shall now therefore inquire *Why St. Paul wrote it*; and then look into the *Salutation*.

I. WHY WAS THE EPISTLE WRITTEN? Of course there was an object. We write our letters for a purpose; we do not write unless we have something to say. It was so with Paul. He felt the danger the young converts were exposed to by the absence of their teachers. It seems he had made two efforts to reach them; but Satan had hindered him (ii. 17, 18). Being unable to come himself, he did the next best thing. He sent the word he was not allowed to bring.

You will notice that the Epistle consists of two parts. The first extends to the end of the third chapter, and has been called the historical portion. It describes the gratitude he feels for the conversion and Christian attitude of his converts; and appeals to them to maintain "the traditions" and to cleave to the truth. This

portion ends with a beautiful prayer that the points he had been dwelling on might be granted to them. The other two chapters form the hortatory, or didactic portion. In it St. Paul warns his readers against the sins of uncleanness and covetousness, and also gives them teaching about the Second Coming of Christ and the duties consequent thereon.

It has been often observed, as you will notice, that this Epistle contains no distinct doctrinal statement except that concerning the Lord's reappearing. It is not a treatise, like the Epistle to the Romans, on Justification, its causes, operations, and results. It is not, like the Epistle to the Galatians, a protest against Judaizing tendencies. There are no passages like those in Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians. It has, in fact, but one careful statement of dogma. Nevertheless Christian doctrine is here either plainly inferred or stated. You will find, for instance, no formal proposition as to the Trinity; but the Apostle tells us there is but one living and true God (i. 9), and he speaks of the Father Who elects, calls to the kingdom and glory, and orders man's goings (i. 4; ii. 12; ii. 4). He speaks of Jesus as "*His Son*" (i. 10), yet equal with Him, for the Church is in "both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus, too, was an historical Person. He had been killed by the Jews (ii. 14, 15), had been raised from the dead (i. 10; iv. 14), and had ascended into heaven, from whence He is to return (iv. 16). Similarly explicit is the Apostle's teaching with regard to the Holy Ghost. The outpouring of the Spirit was the

"gift of God" (iv. 8); the work of conversion was His work. The Gospel came not in word only, but "in power and in the Holy Ghost" (i. 5), hence its success. God was working: the Spirit was there also to give joy; in the midst of their affliction and persecution they had "joy of the Holy Ghost" (i. 6). They had been warned of the danger of trifling with His Divine Presence, for the warning is repeated in the solemn words, "Quench not the Spirit" (v. 19); and the work of Sanctification was impressed on them in almost the concluding words, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (v. 23).

It is interesting also to see how, without any doctrinal statement about the Atonement, the Apostle bears full testimony thereto in this letter. The Saviour is "Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come" (i. 10), Jesus, Who died and was raised again. We "obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us" (v. 9, 10); and we obtain this salvation of His providing through faith in the Gospel; it "effectually worketh" in them that believe (ii. 13). The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus is the keynote of the Epistle; and then the Master comes to take home for ever those who are "in Jesus." The testimony of St. Paul to the depravity of man is emphatic. The Jews, in spite of every privilege, "please not God" (ii. 15). The Gentiles "know not God" (iv. 5). There is no difference. They are "in darkness," children "of the night." They are under Satan's influence, and in danger of the "wrath to come;" a wrath coming unexpectedly, when least looked for, an awful doom, sudden

destruction from which there is no escape. We shall have to dwell on these things in proper order, but I mention them here to show that the Gospel Paul preached, like the Gospel you hear, had all this in it, and that this Epistle testifies to the doctrine he taught.

II. Let me conclude with a few words on the SALUTATION. The words "from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ," are wanting in the best MSS., and have been supplied here by some early copyist. We shall probably therefore not see them in the Revised Translation soon to be available. Their absence is of little moment, especially as we are elsewhere told this truth in these very words. They appear in the salutation of some later Epistles. Grace and mercy can only come from God the Father and the Son. The two words are the forms of Western and Eastern salutation. With "peace" we are all very familiar. The 'Shalom' of Israel is the 'Salaam' of India now; the peace pronounced by the Prince of Peace when He saluted His Apostles, "Peace be unto you;" the peace He was so entitled to bestow. Martin Luther saw in this salutation the whole Gospel. "Grace" is what God gives. In consequence, "Peace" is what man enjoys. It comes to us through faith in Christ, in Him Who is the greatest proof that our God is a God of grace. Let this be no empty salutation. Let us receive the grace; and then, led by the Giver of it, let us have and enjoy peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lecture III.

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia."
I THESS. i. 2-7.

WE have paved the way for rightly understanding the Epistle by finding out who the writer was, who the readers were, and why the Epistle was written. We now proceed not to preach on the doctrines the Epistle may refer to, but to expound the Epistle, and to try and realize what the Thessalonian Christians learned from it. You will observe from these verses the keynote of the Epistle. When Paul wrote he was anxious, fearing, hopeful; but none of these emotions furnish the keynote, *that is Praise*, gratitude to God, from Whom every good and perfect gift comes, and Who had enabled Paul to do the work so well done. We shall occupy ourselves with this *Praise* this morning.

I. THE APOSTLE'S THANKSGIVING.

Verse 2 begins it, and you will notice that it is a *united thanksgiving*. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy all joined in this praise. They had often *prayed* together about these Thessalonians, now they all joined in *praising*; and in this pleasing exercise they found a union even greater than when they prayed. Our united prayer meetings are useful, but they are constrained, an effort, something unusual. Our praises are more real, more united. We do not meet to praise, but when the Church of Christ does praise, we recollect with pleasure those who supply the words we use. In our hymn-books the whole Church meets. Nonconformists and Churchmen, Romanists and Protestants, men of every shade of thought have written hymns which we all can sing; and thus we are taught what perfect union perfect praise will bring, when imperfect praise does so much.

It was *customary praise*. How persistent Paul was in praising! His office was to show forth the praise of God, and he did it; he rejoiced evermore. Whenever he wrote an Epistle he began with praise. There is only one exception, and that is the Epistle to the Galatians. Then, there was so much to blame that the stream of praise is dammed up. But if, in every Epistle he writes, his superscription at the end was a proof of its authenticity, we might almost say that praise at the beginning was a proof as well.

It was *vocal praise*. Paul not only had a heart that made melody and a face that showed his gratitude. He uttered his praise. His voice helped his heart. He made mention in his praise of these friends of his.

They were in his memory first, and then on his lips. Praise God audibly. He invites you to do so. He inhabits our praises. He honours them. It was the voice of praise that filled Solomon's Temple with glory, more than Solomon's prayer or the costly sacrifices (2 Chron. v. 13).

It was *opportune praise*. Paul chose the best place. When he prayed, he praised. It was "in our prayers" that the three praised their God. It was a wise thing for them; the mercies they remembered encouraged them to hope for more success and more blessing. And how good for their friends! St. Paul, like the other Apostles, gave himself "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts vi. 4), and these tried, struggling believers enjoyed the benefit of his intercessions. The value of his prayers for them is learned from his desire that they should pray for him.

It was *comprehensive praise*. The flock was all dear to this under shepherd. He knew them personally. He had preached, persuaded, convinced, comforted, led to Christ each one, so he says, 'We make mention of you *all*.' And his praise was not only wide, but constant. "*Always*." How he had learned Christ! And from him we may learn something of the "Great Shepherd of the sheep." He has His *all* and His *always*. Let us learn to praise; we have much to stimulate us, much to help us. Praise will strengthen us.

" Borne upon their latest breath,
Songs of praise shall conquer death ;
Then, amidst eternal joy,
Songs of praise their powers employ."

II. THE VISIBLE REASONS FOR THIS THANKSGIVING.

"Forget not all His benefits," so says Ps. ciii.; and it was in remembering the mercies and the success experienced at Thessalonica, that Paul had comfort during his short unhappy stay at Athens. This thought also supported him during the struggles of the early part of his work at Corinth. He remembered then "without ceasing" how God blessed his labours at Thessalonica, and was encouraged to hope for similar success elsewhere; "It *becometh* well the just to be thankful." You will see now that there were three great principles manifested in these Christians which principally excited Paul's gratitude, and it is interesting to find, in the earliest of the Apostle's letters, such a recognition of the graces brought out so fully in 1 Cor. xiii. Paul thanked God for their Faith, Love, and Hope.

1. The "*work of faith*" is mentioned first. These people believed, they had yielded to the testimony Paul and his friends adduced, and they had saving faith. But that was a matter between them and their God. He knew what their faith was; they showed it by their profession. This profession was not merely verbal. They did what St. James says every Christian should do; they showed their faith by their works. The works they did were not the result of good nature, or of threats; they were not dictated by a vague hope of getting good by them; they were works of faith. Without faith there had been no works; and without the works St. Paul could never have thanked God for their faith. The latter was proved by the former. Grand works

are the works of faith! Some of them are recorded in Heb. xi.; to these the Thessalonians added their modest lists. They had accepted the Lord Jesus, they were now following and obeying Him, and here were the works.

2. The "*labour of love*" was the next fruit added to heighten the Apostle's flame of gratitude. They loved their Lord. They loved those who shared their faith. But their love was not mere sentiment; it was not the love which says, "Be ye warmed and filled," and yet makes no provision to carry out the wish. It was a love that had a labour with it. It was a love not "in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (Jas. ii. 16; 1 John iii. 18). It was the love that bore burdens (Gal. vi. 2), for the labour here spoken of was a 'burden'—a burden like that borne by Paul when at Ephesus, to which he referred when he said, "I have shewed you all things, how that so *labouring* ye ought to support the weak" (Acts xx. 35)—and yet being borne by love made no burden at all. How often we see specimens of this "*labour of love*," when a parent, brother, sister, child, husband or wife does, for one dear to them, offices from which a hired nurse would shrink, or which would prove too onerous for any paid services! Yet love has eliminated all the burden, and the labour they bestow is the evidence of their affection, just as, with these Thessalonians, their labour showed their love. Nothing but love would do what love does. Nothing else could stand for the portrait drawn in 1 Cor. xiii.

3. The "*patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*" was the third visible mark which called forth apos-

tolic gratitude. In earthly things the tendency of hope is to make men impatient. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." The hope these Thessalonians had was one held in spite of opposition, contradiction, and disappointment. Still they held it; and their hope was manifest by their patience. This patience was shown not only in the way they waited for what they expected, but by the endurance they exhibited amid the scorn and hatred of a frowning world. They hoped for that they saw not, and then with patience waited for it (Rom. viii. 25). They might well be patient, not only on account of the promise of God, but also on account of the instalment they had received. Their "hope" made them "not ashamed;" because of the love of God which was shed abroad in their hearts (Rom. v. 5). They had that within which kept the heart from being sick. The hope too was not a vague one—not for happiness in general—but "in our Lord Jesus Christ," that is, in His return. That hope, which St. Paul elsewhere (Titus ii. 13) calls "that blessed hope," filled their hearts just as it fills this Epistle. Of course St. Paul knew nothing of our division into chapters and verses; but, as divided, you will notice how prominently the Second Coming appears. Each chapter ends with it. That hope gave them patience, and taught it too.

4. What excited greater gratitude in St. Paul's heart was that these three active principles were exhibited, not before men, not before their spiritual teachers, not with the object of gaining sympathy or applause, but "*in the sight of God and our Father.*"

They exercised and made fruitful their faith, and love, and hope to please their God and Father, to honour Him, to be worthy subjects of the King Jesus. They had, in fact, to live as "ever in the great Taskmaster's eye."

How rejoiced was Paul to hear that they had this faith, love, and hope, but how much happier to hear that all were bearing fruit, and so praising God !

III. But we must go a step further and notice THE GREAT REASON FOR THIS APOSTOLIC THANKFULNESS.

We have it in the words, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." The margin gives the reading which is now adopted by all commentators, "Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election." The reason for Paul's joy was not so much their standing with man as their standing with God. You see that they were "*beloved of God.*" Think of the depth of that word—it was used by our Father to His Son Jesus, "My beloved Son"—and compare it with the word 'hated,' which described their position among many in Thessalonica ! What an honour ! The part of the verb used too, describes a love of long standing, and identifies the feeling God had to them with that revealed as existing to His covenant people in Jer. xxxi. 3, "I have loved thee with an *everlasting love.*" They were all Jedidiahs—beloved of God—beloved by Him Who said, "As My Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love" (St. John xv. 9). Then they were *chosen*. Paul knew their "*election of God.*" It was not the fact that they had chosen God which here made Paul thankful. They had

indeed chosen Him ; but the spring for his gratitude was that God had chosen them. We must not let the unpopularity of a doctrine, or a name given to those who hold it, deter us from grasping the truth. I call no man 'Master.' I may be called a Calvinist, but I do not hold many of Calvin's views ; still if to believe in a personal election in God's sovereign purposes entitles a man to that name, the opprobrium of earning it shall not deter me from holding what my Bible and our seventeenth Article teach. Look at Rom. viii. 30, and see the golden chain ; the believer is foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, glorified. Look at Eph. i. 4, God "hath chosen us" in Christ "before the foundation of the world." Look at 1 Peter i. 2, we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." Look at the Second Epistle to these Thessalonians (ii. 13), "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." The doctrine is there, and you see it plainly stated in Rom. ix. It cannot be explained away, and to say that the word 'elect' is coterminous with 'baptized' appears to me not only to be contrary to fact, but to involve the doctrine in greater difficulty. The doctrine is here. Article xvii. makes it a doctrine of our Church, and I humbly accept it now. We shall understand it by and by.

Paul tells us that this was not a mere opinion of his that these Christians were "beloved of God" and elect. He *knew* it, and Silas and Timothy knew it too. Paul also knew later on that Clement and other "fellow-labourers" had their names in the "book of life," and here he tells us whence this confidence arose ;

partly by the way in which the Gospel came to them, "*Our Gospel came not unto you in word only.*" It was not simply a sermon decently preached and patiently listened to. It was not a faithful statement of truth just endured. It was not seed sown by the wayside, to all intents lost, taken away by the devil. It was a word, a message, but it was more. It was the voice of man, but a voice echoing in their consciences the voice of God. It came "*also in power.*" It was not merely that miracles were wrought (if they were); it was that a Divine power went with the preacher's voice, moving hearts which nothing else could stir, and pricking consciences which were apparently seared. It was a message that could not be resisted, which claimed every energy, and had to be attended to in spite of every inclination to the contrary; and the reason was, it came "*in the Holy Ghost.*" He accompanied the Word. Paul had preached it "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," and that Word had proved the means of their conversion by His mighty power. No other power could accomplish this, and He had graciously done it. The Gospel had also come "*in much assurance.*" They had taken it all in. Yes, *all!* Not merely the word which justly told them of their guilt and danger, but the word which told of the Saviour's death and blood. They had been compelled to believe the first, they had been enabled to believe the second, and they received all with "*much assurance.*" The way, therefore, in which the message had come to them, so different from the way in which it had come to the men of Athens, was a proof that they were "*beloved of God;*" and there was

another proof, that was the 'manner' of the Preachers, "*Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*" What manner of men! The reference here is not to the upright and holy walk of the Apostle and his companions; *that* is mentioned in chap. ii. 10. The reference must be to the help God gave them; to the wondrous power He put into their preaching, their persuasions, and their entreaties; to the very unction and energy which marked their manner and appearance when they stood up as God's ambassadors. They spoke with such power, they preached with such evident tokens of His presence and blessing, that it was manifest God was working with them, and meant to bring home His own Word.

The election was marked in another way. They received the Gospel, and at once "*became followers*" of "the apostles." They cast in their lot with them and avowed themselves to be of their company. And it was no mere human attachment which moved them to the avowal, they followed "the apostles" because *they* followed "the Lord." They took up their cross and went after Him. "In much affliction"—so the course ran—but it led to the Kingdom; and He Whom they followed helped them, so that they went on "with joy of the Holy Ghost." They were elect; they walked before God the Father; they hoped in the Lord Jesus Christ; they had joy in the Holy Ghost. And so clearly did they show their calling that they became "*ensamples to all that believe[d] in Macedonia and Achaia.*" Brethren, let us follow their faith, and, like them, make our calling and election sure.

Lecture IV.

"So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."—I THESS. i. 7-10.

Two proofs of the election of these Thessalonians to eternal life have been afforded, one, the way in which God sent the word; the other, the way in which they received it. There follows here a third proof, *the influence of their conversion*; and this is augmented by the evidence they gave of *the completeness of their conversion*. We now proceed to notice this as it is stated in the paragraph now under consideration.

I. THE INFLUENCE EXERTED BY THE THESSALONIAN CHRISTIANS.

1. It was *exemplary*. It affected even those already believing, and those who afterwards got faith. They heard of these Christians Paul loved so much and had to leave so soon. They learned their history and then compared their own with it. The result was no doubt

a self-examination ; and we who believe have to follow them in making these Thessalonians 'an ensample.' Is our conversion real? Have we experienced the power of God in the preached Gospel as they did? Have we received it as they did, and have we their consistent holy joy? What they had we may have. The same exhaustless treasury is there, and faith is the key they had, which we have too. Happy Christians, whose influence, exerted unconsciously, not only touched the saints then living, but affects us who live so many years after they have passed away! We have influence too. Let us beware what it affects; and, to avoid further evil, may the Gospel be our heaven-sent possession, our best treasure, our daily guide.

2. The influence was *startling*. "It sounded out." Yet marvellous and interesting as their conversion was, it was not so much *that* that sounded out. Just as men had wondered when Saul the son of Kish was "among the prophets," or when Saul of Tarsus, with his commission to destroy Christians, began to preach the Gospel, so many may have wondered at these Thessalonians being converted. But the wonder thereat gave way to a greater wonder, the wonder at the power which had effected the change. *The Word of God* had done it, and "*from you,*" says St. Paul, "*sounded out the word of the Lord.*" Its claim to be heard was met, and from the newly-formed Church at Thessalonica the sound went forth. To be of effect to any soul that word must sound forth. The ears are stopped, nay, the sinner is dead. One sound only can raise him, and that is the Word of God ; "The hour is

coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God : and they that hear shall live " (St. John v. 25). That voice is now in the Written Word, and there it still sounds forth.

The area over which it was heard was wide ; " Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." It should have been so. The name of a Macedonian conqueror had spread far and wide, and has been covered with what the world calls 'glory' even till now. The fame of the Galilean King Jesus must outshine Alexander's, and He must conquer where the great commander only swayed his sceptre. Alexander's dominions are now resounding with the glories of another Name, and witness the victories of a greater Conqueror. And in regions which he never saw, or dreamt of—"in every place"—does the Gospel of a mightier Prince win its undying trophies. There is no noise. Just as God's works speak without a voice (save in the wonder of those who see them), just as the heavens, the firmament, day and night, declare His glory—declare it though there is "no speech nor language, their voice is not heard"—so the conversion of these Thessalonians spoke ; and the Word of the Lord "sounded out" (though there too no voice was heard), and the effect was the same. As Addison rightly renders Psalm xix. 3 (disfigured in our Prayer Book version by the interpolated *but*),

" What though *no real* speech or sound
Amid those radiant orbs be found ;
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth their glorious voice ;

For ever singing as they shine
The Hand that made us is divine,"

so it was here.

3. The influence was *deeply felt*. The language of the Apostle is a little involved. To preserve the plain sense you would expect St. Paul to stop at "every place;" then the sentence is complete. The only other way of reading the verse would be to put the full stop after "word of the Lord," and that would make the first part of the verse very bald. It is better, therefore, to leave the verse as it is, and to see that while Paul is thinking of the Word of God, his mind is led to think of that which makes the Word effectual, to commend their faith. He says, "Your faith to God-ward is spread abroad." Their simple, confiding faith excited remark. The news of it was borne to distant parts by the many merchants and travellers who visited Thessalonica; and just as we admire the faith of Abraham, of Luther, of Müller of Bristol, and other saints, so the faith of these Thessalonians was admired too, and men glorified God in them. Their example helped Paul. Before he could speak of the Gospel and urge its adoption, men anticipated him with the news from Thessaly, "*so that*," says he, "we need not to speak any thing." Realize now how deep and true must have been the faith which could work such an influence! No wonder Paul gave thanks to God for them all, making mention of them in his prayers!

II. The influence of these Thessalonians was owing to the COMPLETENESS OF THEIR CONVERSION, to which friends and others bore testimony.

1. It was owned *unhesitatingly*. "*They themselves show.*" The world watches the Church. It is always anxious to find flaws and to exaggerate them. The world's testimony to conversion is therefore very valuable. The world hates the Church. The pleasures, the self-denial, the aim, the end of the believer all testify against the world, make the world uneasy; and then it hates what gives disquiet. This was all foreseen, foretold; "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake" (Matt. x. 22). The Master was hated and called Beelzebub. So must the servants be. But the servant must be "as his Master," and if so, he will be hated "without a cause." Or, if there be a cause, as in Daniel's case (Dan. vi. 4, 5), it will not be indolence, or presumption, or wrong, but because he obeys his God. It was so in Peter's days, when Christians suffered for "well-doing," and their God was glorified "in the day of visitation" by their persecutors (1 Peter iii. 16, 17). What therefore was wanted from a would-be bishop was wanted from every Christian, namely, that he should "have a good report of them which are without" (1 Tim. iii. 7), and this, these Thessalonians had, had it so fully that men volunteered to speak of it; and when they heard that Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus were the men who had preached to their friends, they said, 'We know *you*'—"They themselves show *of us*," says St. Paul—and the disciples' conversion gave their teachers a hearing elsewhere.

2. The completeness of the conversion was testified to *intelligently*. The hearers had inquired how it was. It was not the result of miracle or prodigy. It came

not from excitement or alarm. It was the work of quiet painstaking teaching. "They themselves show of us *what manner of entering in we had unto you.*" They had been arrested by the preachers' earnestness. They had felt the force of the truth which was preached; and convinced, they had yielded. Then, in spite of all opposition and disappointment, they had held fast. Real men those; saints of God! Such a testimony was valuable. Let it be repeated.

3. That they were really converted was proved by *what they were known to have left.* They had given up their "*idols.*" To us how little that seems! To part with those hideous things of which we have seen specimens in our museums, and pictures in our missionary magazines. Ah, but their idols were not like these; and even from these how hard it is to part! The Hindoo has invested his idol—though it is nothing, worse than nothing—with so much of horror, or terror, or sanctity, that he finds it hard to give it up and to break the fascination which a visible object of devotion wields. Moloch and Baal were foul idols, but see how they enticed Israel away, so much so that the sin is likened to the sinful passion which leads to adultery. But the idols of these Thessalonians were carved and chiselled by the highest art, and were forms of beauty. Idolatry (as now in India) twined round every art of life, in public and in the family. It was the way in which their fathers had trod. It was felt in everyday tradition, and embalmed in poetry and song. These men had heard the Gospel. They had to choose between God and idols; and painful as the struggle

was, involving the rupture of family ties and dearest friendships, they proved the strength of their convictions, they turned from idols.

4. They did more than this. Some men, notably the youths in India who have obtained what now passes for education in that great empire, cannot cleave to their idols without doing violence to common sense. But then, having given up the lie, they remain without the truth. The polytheist becomes an atheist, and, thinking that all religious systems are like his own abandoned one, has no religion at all. These Thessalonians learned the nothingness of idols, and their souls rejoiced in finding a God Who was not an idol, not a lifeless and a lying block of wood or stone, but "the living and true God."

"The living God" was an expression the Jew loved. You find it on David's lips as well as Peter's and the High Priest's (1 Sam. xvii. ; St. Matt. xvi. 16 ; and xxvi. 63). St. Paul has it thrice ; and in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is used four times. The "true God" is an expression found on the lips of the Lord Jesus in His prayer to His Father (St. John xvii. 3) ; and the words combined give us a glorious view of our God, "the Living and True." These early Christians had found Him, and they *turned* to Him.

5. Their turning was not a mere mental, a mere emotional affair. They turned "to *serve* the living and true God." It was not even mere worship ; the word used here is never translated worship. It means 'to serve as a slave.' It implies all the outward respect which worship shows forth, but it goes a great

deal further. It was not merely the recognition of God, on solemn and state occasions, before a few like-minded men, but it was a constant service, a service before both friend and foe, a service which felt that "the living and true God" was Lord of all, and must be obeyed. It is interesting here to note that the Latin form of the word used in the Greek has been taken by Romanists to signify the kind of worship to be given to saints and angels. To God they give *latría*, to these created beings *dulia*. Let us be primitive. Like the Thessalonians, let us gladden apostolic hearts by giving our worship, our *dulia*, to "the living and true God."

6. Their turning, their conversion, was more than this. They abandoned idolatry, they served God. Many did this after a fashion, and an acceptable fashion too, and yet were not Christians. These Thessalonians had also turned to "*His Son—Jesus.*" He was the centre of their system, the foundation of their hopes, the object of their love, and the pattern of their service. They saw the Father in Him. They came to God by Him. Their God was God in Christ. Him they served. He had worn their nature, lived in it, died in it, been "*raised from the dead*" in it by "the living and true God" (for Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God, effected that resurrection), and He is wearing that nature now. These thoughts enabled them to realize Him, and those who saw Him, saw the Father. They served Him out of love and gratitude. He "*delivered us from the wrath to come.*" Such wrath! The wrath stirred up by our own sins (Prov. i. 24-32); the wrath laid up by themselves (Rom. ii. 5); "the wrath of the Lamb."

He was the Deliverer. No effort therefore was too great which was made for Him. He was absent in body, He was in *Heaven*, working with them, for them, and in them. In heart and mind they thither ascended, but they did more than this. When they turned from idols, they turned to God "to serve" Him, and "*to wait for His Son from heaven,*" to wait for *Him*, not for death, no, for Him. They expected His return. They looked up, hoping to see His sign, and in patience they waited for Him. How this must have sanctified their every deed, their every day—(it might be their last)—and, how it showed the thoroughness of their conversion! We have idols, though not palpable like theirs. Have we turned from them? Does God occupy their place, and take up "the aching void the world can never fill"? Do we *serve* Him? Not merely enjoy public and private worship. Do we serve Him, "not only with our lips but in our lives"? Is Jesus our Deliverer? Are the bonds burst, are we free? And then are we looking for Him? If so, we have done much to show that, like these Thessalonians, we are 'brethren beloved of God,' and that we are making our calling and election sure.

Lecture V.

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: but even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."—
I THESS. ii. 1-8.

THE first chapter contains Paul's thanksgiving to God for the conversion of the Thessalonians, and this chapter contains an appeal to themselves founded thereon. They formed a young Church, they had attracted great attention. Circumstances had made them a city set on a hill; they would be watched and attacked. Seducers would go forth among them, and a fair start might be marred by failure eventually, and the good effect of their spiritual history destroyed. Hence follows an appeal to them. Things still fresh in their memory

are laid before them. They are told not only of their first love, but of those who were sent by God to win their hearts for Him. Others had told "what manner of entering in" Paul and his fellow-labourers had unto them (i. 9), but "yourselves, brethren, know our entrance." You will notice how often in this chapter the Apostle appeals to their personal acquaintance with facts (verses 1, 2, 5, 9, 11). Others could speak what they hoped or believed, but they *knew* the "entrance" had not been "in vain." Their attentive ears, their engrossed hearts, their saved souls, their changed lives supplied a powerful, undeniable testimony. 'Yourselves know our entrance;' truly it has led to such grand results, it was not in vain.

I have taken a long paragraph to-day, hoping to preserve the better the Apostle's line of thought, and I believe we shall best understand the argument by making the word "*bold*" the keynote. Here St. Paul shows himself a bold apostle.

I. IT WAS A BOLD THING FOR ST. PAUL TO ATTEMPT AN ENTRANCE AT ALL.

Thessalonica was a heathen, Christless city. It lay in the hands of the "strong man armed," and Paul went there to win souls for Christ. The foe was strong, and what kind of champions came to assail it? Men with disabled bodies, for Paul writes describing the 'entrance;' it was "*after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated—at Philippi.*" They had just undergone the humiliating and painful scene recorded in Acts xvi. Unjustly, without inquiry, the magistrates

had helped the mob, for their own hands tore the garments from the backs of Paul and Silas ; and then there was inflicted the beating with rods and the imprisonment 'in the stocks.' With their backs still sore these soldiers of the Cross appeared at Thessalonica, and despite their painful experience, effected an entrance there, for "*we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God.*"

But bodily pain was not the only drawback, they had to preach "*with much contention.*" The force of this expression is not exhausted by the difficulties thrown in his way when Paul preached at Thessalonica, as recorded in Acts xvii. 5-9. It takes in also the trepidation and anxiety of Paul's own aching heart. The word for "contention" is that from which our 'agony' comes. This was an agony of which the Philippians had been witness (Phil. i. 20). It may have been in the form of a doubt whether the vision of the 'man of Macedonia' and his touching appeal (Acts xvi. 9) were not, after all, the suggestions of his overwrought mind or the production of Satan. If not, why this treatment ? Words used later of another conflict may well describe this agony : "When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side ; without were fightings, within were fears" (2 Cor. vii. 5). Still the attack was made and the boldness proved. Paul almost implies that any other man would have held back, but he disclaims all boasting, for he gives the source of the boldness, it was "*in our God.*" He was, as he told the Ephesians to be, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

He was, in fact, as usual very bold. Before his conversion he was bold, and he was still bolder afterwards. Barnabas was able to testify that he had "preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus," and this led to his being received by the brethren, and to his then speaking so boldly that the Grecians sought to slay him (Acts ix. 27-29). The boldness appears all through the narrative of his ministry, and is stated twice (Acts xiii. 46 ; xix. 8). It characterized him when he stood before Agrippa (Acts xxvi. 20), and was only wanting a fresh baptism when he wrote to the Ephesians that they should pray that he might 'speak boldly, as he ought to speak' (Ephes. vi. 20). As he writes the Epistle now before us, he recalls the circumstances, and says, what we must indorse, "*we were bold.*"

II. PAUL WAS BOLD BECAUSE HIS OBJECT WAS GOOD.

"The righteous are bold as a lion." He came to do his Master's business with clean hands and a pure heart. He came with what he calls "*our exhortation.*" The word used is akin to that title given to the Holy Ghost, "the Comforter," and the work was His work. It was exhortation because it aroused and alarmed ; it showed the sinner his state, misery, and danger, and then comforted by pointing out the only and all-sufficient Saviour. May that be "*our exhortation*" too ! This exhortation was "*not of deceit.*" The Apostle brought the Thessalonians no cunningly-devised fable to amuse or lull them. It was all true. Had he brought a lie, he might have been impudent ; the truth made him 'bold.' Nor was his exhortation "*of uncleanness.*"

He had no scheme by which to minister to men's carnal cravings, satisfying their unclean lusts under the guise of a religion either sanctioning or pardoning them. There were Jews who did this, and supposed Christian teachers too (Rev. ii. 20), but no such preachers could have had Paul's front; they might have been insinuating and pushing, but not "bold in our God." *Nor* was the exhortation "*in guile*." He was not such an one as Elymas of Acts xiii. 10, that sorcerer whom Paul denounced as 'full of guile,' for the word is that used here. All he wanted was that good should be done. He had a single eye to God's glory. There was nothing on his conscience to make him a coward, and hence he was bold.

III. PAUL WAS BOLD BECAUSE HIS MISSION WAS CLEAR.

The agony was over. He was in the right way. The scene in Philippi, the success in Thessalonica were tokens for good. He was doing his duty. He had been "*put in trust with the Gospel*." That Gospel was not only peace to himself, it was to be peace to others. It was his not only to enjoy, but to keep pure and to pass on. Let us bear this in mind. It tells us how we are to take, and hold the Gospel. Having the Gospel, he must proclaim it; and his *mission* was to preach it. Paul was 'bold' because as he was intrusted so he spoke; "so we speak." He passed the glad news on. But do not overlook the "so." We have it before in Acts xiv. 1, Paul "*so* spake, that a great multitude—believed." But he spoke not merely from benevolent impulse or grateful obedience, he and his friends had a Divine com-

mission ; '*They were approved of God*' to be intrusted with the Gospel. Not "allowed ;" the word here used is the same as that rendered "trieth" at the end of this very verse. God had tried Paul. He told Ananias He had approved of him, and chosen him to do His work. Paul had been 'separated unto the Gospel' of Christ, and with such a Gospel and such a commission to declare it, no wonder he was "bold."

The way he did the work increased his boldness. Hear his aim, "*Not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.*" He was doing God's work. He was to speak like Ezekiel, whether men would hear, or whether they would forbear. Results were God's, the work his. He had the comfort enjoyed by the missionary uncheered by conversion, who had a dream, in which he saw a man, trying to dig down a mountain, encouraged by the employer saying, 'I will pay you whether you succeed or not.' Still he tried the best methods, put forth his best efforts. His heart's desire was that men should be saved. God knew it, for He implanted the desire, and Paul strove to please Him. Man, he never tried to please (Gal. i. 10)—that were a hopeless task—but to please the God Who had called and commissioned him, was to do what Enoch did. He would succeed, and hence he was bold at his work.

IV. HE WAS BOLD, BECAUSE HIS COURSE WAS STRAIGHT-FORWARD.

With respect to its outward manifestation he could appeal to them, "*As ye know.*" As to the inward spring he could appeal far higher, "*God is witness.*"

His conscience was void of offence in this matter toward God and man; "*Neither at any time used we flattering words.*" Not even to secure a hearing did he flatter. How unusual! Look at modern orators desirous of influencing the public mind and of getting the public vote, oh, how they flatter! Says Paul, 'We never did. We would spread no net for your feet' (Prov. xxix. 5). Nevertheless he always put the truth courteously; there was no rudeness, but great plainness. Flattery! he had to tell of depravity so deep rooted that regeneration was indispensable within, and an atonement without. That was Paul's A B C, and his 'first of all;' he could use no flattering words. His words were free from the taint of greed of gain. He never used "a cloke of covetousness." His converts never saw the "cloke," God never saw the covetousness. Many teachers were greedy of gain. They sought, nay, "ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward" (Jude 11); through covetousness 'with feigned words' made 'merchandise' of souls (2 Peter ii. 3), and taught things they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. But Paul had no such desire. When he tells Timothy to be content with food and raiment, and enforces the advice with the result of his experience (1 Tim. vi. 5-11), he only recommends the course he had always pursued himself. There was no sinister motive to mar his boldness. And again, there was no desire for earthly honour; "*Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others.*" Yet this spirit had moved even Apostles, and that too at the first Lord's Table (Luke xxii. 24). It got into disciples like Diotrefes, who loved "to have the pre-

eminence" (3 John 9); while the world was moved by it, from Simon who gave out that he "was some great one," to him who wept that there were no more worlds to conquer. Yet Paul and his friends refrained from all this, even when they "*might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.*" It is evident that the burdensomeness, if insisted on, would have been an exertion of deference to them on account of their spiritual office. It was not the "rod," as in 1 Cor. iv. 21, for there was nothing to punish; nor could the reference be to their sustenance, for that is mentioned in a separate connection (see verse 9). No, St. Paul refers to what he might have exacted in the way of deference and station as a mere teacher, and how much more as a bringer of good tidings; but this he had put aside along with covetousness and flattery. His Master's glory was the only glory he sought, and thus being straightforward he was "bold."

V. THE LAST FEATURE OF THE APOSTOLIC BOLDNESS
TO BE NOTICED IS ITS GENTLENESS.

Hitherto the Apostle had reminded them of what he was not. In verses 7 and 8 he tells them that he was, so far from exacting anything from them, *gentle*: "*We were gentle among you.*" The word occurs only once again in Paul's writings, in 2 Tim. ii. 24, when he is describing "the servant of the Lord;" he "must not strive, but be gentle." The word implies mildness; the treatment of a subject by a kind, condescending king, or a child by a parent. Paul was this "*among you.*" He bore with them, with their slowness,

ignorance, perverseness. He sympathized with them, being 'gentle' among them.

He defines the kind of gentleness. It was deeper by far than the condescension we have mentioned ; it was "*even as a nurse cherisheth her children.*" The care of helpless confiding childhood is an engrossing one, and even hired nurses have their kindest feelings drawn out towards their charges ; they cherish and protect them. But Paul went further than the kindest nurse, he takes the figure of the mother, the nursing-mother ; for the original implies cherishes her *own* children. Mark, not only the lover and guardian of children, not only the mother, but the nursing-mother, the figure which God takes to illustrate the utmost of human love ; "Can a woman forget her sucking child ?" (Isa. xlix. 15.) Such was Paul's love, and he expresses the same idea in Gal. iv. 19 : "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again." His was the gentle boldness of love. And it was a gentleness which grew ; "*So being affectionately desirous of you.*" Paul uses a peculiar word, of which our translation is a good paraphrase. His love is like that which Jonathan had to David, self-sacrificing ; nay, still like a mother's love, who gives food convenient, and a resting-place on her bosom. Paul so used his converts. They had "the sincere milk of the word ;" "*We were willing to have imparted to you,—the gospel of God.*" But he would do more than this ; and just as the nursing-mother gives herself to the babe at her breast, so Paul would have given *not* the Gospel *only*, but, he says, "*also our own souls.*" Had his life been needed he would have given it, and why ?

"Because ye were dear unto us." Oh, what a change in Paul! A few years before to be "of this way" was to provoke his wrath, to evoke a storm of threatening and slaughter, to be subject to his efforts, to be compelled to blaspheme; and now, to be in the kingdom is to be dear to him, and to evoke his tenderest love. Why, and how the change? As in the apologue, the clay had been lying near the rose and partook of its perfume; so Paul had been to Jesus, had learned of Him, had got His love and His boldness too.

Lecture VI.

"For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail : for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."—
1 THESS. ii. 9-13.

THE groundwork of St. Paul's appeal (yet to be made) to the Thessalonians is here continued. He had, as we have seen, reminded them of his boldness, a boldness shading down into motherly tenderness; and in the present paragraph he enlarges on the affection he bore them, and shows four particulars in which it was exhibited. Let us, with God's help, notice them.

I. HIS LOVE WAS SHOWN IN HIS SELF-DENIAL.

Self-denial is both the essence and result of love. Love which exercises no self-denial, but simply follows out a blind craving, is an animal instinct, not love which is "of God." Paul was able to appeal to the Thessalonians that the true mark of love had been shown among them: "*Ye remember, brethren.*" It was so rare a thing, so

bright a thing, that they could not forget how he had shown it. 'We came to you with the rarest of treasures, the unspeakable gift of God; but we came not as self-seekers, nor as tradesmen with merchandise to sell, we came as fellow-men. You recollect the three Jews who were artisans, and you know how we plied our trade; "Ye remember, brethren, our *labour and travail*." We had no money, no friends; bread was dear, at famine prices, and you know (for you saw us at it) how hard we worked.' The Apostle followed his common course, the course of which he reminded the Corinthians (1 Cor. iv. 12) when he said we "labour, working with our own hands;" and to which he thus alluded before the elders of the Church at Miletus, "These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (Acts xx. 34). His work was manual. There was not much skill about it, and it is likely that it was very poorly paid. The work was hard. These words, "labour and travail," occur together in only two other passages. One is 2 Thess. iii. 8, where the idea and language of this verse are repeated, the other is 2 Cor. xi. 27, where the words are rendered "in weariness and painfulness;" and these examples help us, in some measure, to understand the way in which Paul earned his bread. Then see how long his hours were! We have abridged the hours of labour, and we read with pain of those who spend weary hours, say, in shirt-making; but here the great Apostle talks of labouring with his deficient eyesight, "*night and day*." He came to give, not to get, and here he pursued the

course so fully and touchingly detailed in 2 Cor. xii. 13-15. All this while he was ready to meet inquirers. Some followed him home from synagogue or street; and many could remember how, while busy at his work, or, when in the warmth of argument and entreaty he had laid it aside, he, there and then, *preached unto them the Gospel of God*. This self-denying love had its effect. It was well remembered.

II. HIS LOVE WAS SHOWN IN HIS EXAMPLE.

The closeness of Paul's communion with his Lord was shown in the closeness of his walk with Him. It was so evident, that he could without any boasting appeal to it. He exercised himself to have always a "conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts xxiv. 16), and so (as in verse 10) he could appeal to God and man, "*Ye are witnesses, and God also.*" The appeal he made to the Corinthians (2 Cor. vii. 2), and to the Ephesian elders (Acts xx. 33-35), shows the strength of his ground. He boldly treads in the steps of Samuel, who on laying down his official position made a similar appeal (1 Sam. xii. 2, 3). Paul's appeal is that they had seen "*how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves.*" The first two adverbs are found together again in the New Testament, and every true Christian was to be an example of both. One was a virtue toward God, and the other toward man. The latter existed because of the former; the former found exhibition in the latter. Zacharias when praising God for His mercy to him, at the circumcising of John the Baptist, saw this, and described the result of redemption

as enabling man to serve God "in holiness and righteousness;" and St. Paul tells the Ephesians (iv. 24) that the new man "is created in righteousness and true holiness." This ideal Paul set before him, and, how far he had succeeded in reaching it, they knew. Then, he was *unblamable*, as he had always tried to be; the false ideal of his youth had been actually reached—"touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," so says Phil. iii. 6—and in the same way Zacharias and Elisabeth attained it (St. Luke i. 6). In the Gospel this was Paul's object also. That he had attained God's ideal he dared not say; nay, he says he had not attained, but he was reaching forth towards it (Phil. iii. 12, 13). We must beware now of thinking that he was striving after what does not concern us. We have to strive after the unblamableness too. Like the Philippians, we are to be blameless and harmless; and we must pray that God may establish our hearts "unblameable," as Paul does (iii. 13) in this Epistle for the Thessalonians. Do not think it impossible; look at the stepping-stones! Holy and just, then unblamable. Aspire to be—what Ps. xv. is said to describe—a 'citizen of Zion.' Do what it requires, namely, "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah vi. 8). Paul did this, and we have him for a loving example.

You will observe the limitation mentioned; "*among you that believe.*" After a certain point had been passed, those who "were without" would see no charm in Christians. The "favour with all the people" (Acts ii. 47) availed Stephen nothing where their prejudices were concerned; they stoned him in

spite of his earnestness, and his miracles, and his angelic face. It must not dishearten us that we do not please all men. Paul did not in Thessalonica. He was, to many, a disturber of the public peace, and a preacher of revolutionary doctrines; and so, in the eyes of Tacitus, Christians were "a set of people holden in abhorrence for their crimes," believing "a pernicious superstition," and themselves really "criminals deserving the severest punishment," for whom the atrocities of Nero had created undeserved pity. There is a danger when all men "speak well" of us persistently. Jesus pronounced a woe on those who gained such a distinction by the sacrifice of principle, or by inconsistent compromise. Still, if men hate, it must be "without a cause." But notice again, this limitation is remarkable. It adds lustre to the example. Before the world Paul would be on his guard; among his friends he would lay aside all reserve. Any sins, shortcomings, or compromises would be manifest in such a circle. Among them, however, there was no difference; he was not betrayed into anything like murmuring or ungodliness. They saw him at war and at peace, at home and abroad; and he was still holy, just, unblamable, the true model of the Christian minister, who "allures to brighter worlds and leads the way." It was 'for their sakes.'

III. THE AFFECTION OF THE APOSTLE WAS FURTHER SHOWN IN HIS TEACHING.

If like a mother he had nourished these babes in Christ—like a parent had set them a loving example—now like a father he says he teaches, or rather he says, "*Ye know how we exhorted.*" How? See *how widely* this teach-

ing was given, "*Every one of you.*" What a pattern ministry! Paul not only exercised public but private teaching. He had dealings with individual souls. He knew them all. Nay, even when writing, he knew there were some who would not be able to be present at the gathering when his letter was read; and still remembering 'each one of them,' requires "that this Epistle be read to all the holy brethren" (v. 27). How he loved each soul, 'every one,' without respect of persons, rich or poor, high or low, bond or free, Jew or Greek! 'I taught every one of you.' Oh for grace and strength to follow in his steps!

How? See *how kindly* this teaching was given, "*As a father doth his children.*" Think of all this implies. God could use no higher figure; "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Think of the patience, perseverance, attention; think of the love; love needed in dealing with inapt, slow, and unwilling learners.

How? See *how fully* the teaching was given, "*We exhorted and comforted and charged.*" There was the loud cry of *warning*, pointing out danger, and showing, with earnestness and love, the way of escape. There was the *encouraging* word to those who were running and had fallen, as well as the comfort or encouragement to be given by them to the feeble-minded (1 Thess. v. 14), during their journey and after failure. Few but a father can do what the Apostle does here; can tell of sin and help at the same time. And then there was the *charge*, some say the adjuration, to persevere; followed by the long, unfailing testimony of lip and

life, the best legacy a father can leave behind. All this these Christians had.

How ? See how *practical* the teaching was ! Not mere dry doctrine, nor even sweet comforting doctrine only. No, the teaching enforced by exhortation, encouragement, and testimony was, "*that ye would walk worthy of God ;*" teaching of which the Apostle reminds his hearers further on in the Epistle, when he says (iv. 1), "Ye have received of us how ye ought to walk." What a high mark, "worthy of God" ! Yes, for these Thessalonians, as afterwards for the converts at Colossæ, St. Paul's prayer was that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. i. 10); worthy of Him Who is the King of Glory, and has the service and adoration of the heavenly host ; worthy of Him Who will treat unworthy servants, that presumptuously transgress, as He treated Nadab and Abihu. For, when (probably under the influence of strong drink) they "offered strange fire before the Lord," they were consumed by fire and "died before the Lord," and the solemn lesson was thus taught to Aaron and to us, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. x. 1-3, 9). But it was not His glory, nor His anger which was to move them most, they were taught to "walk worthy of God, *Who hath called you* unto His kingdom and glory ;" worthy of One Who has shown such love to *you*, so far off, so unworthy. He has put you into His kingdom, and invited you to His glory. He "called" to both at once ; "The Lord will give grace and glory." He *is* calling now, and though even our most lively efforts of

thought cannot tell "what we shall be," our gratitude bids us "walk worthy" of One Who is our Leader to such glory. It needed a loving father to give such a lesson, and needed the threefold effort to impress it. What affection in the teaching! Remember it, and use the test—Is it worthy of God?—to every doubtful case; worthy of Him? worthy of what He is going to make me?

IV. Let us now look at the APOSTLE'S AFFECTION AS MANIFESTED IN HIS THANKSGIVING.

The gratitude to God expressed in this Epistle is interesting and instructive; three times (in chapter i. 2, here, and iii. 9) Paul bursts forth into praise. The exhibition he and his co-workers gave was of God's enabling; the result of their labour was reached by God blessing their efforts. He must have all the glory, "*For this cause also thank we God.*" The words "this cause" may refer to what had preceded,—God's blessing on their labours,—or, to what follows; and, in fact, in what follows *all* is summed up and forms cause for a noble and *ceaseless* song of praise. But let us make the verse plainer by omitting the definite article, and the words in italics; "*For this cause also* [even on this account] *thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received a word of God which ye heard of us* [a word of hearing from us of God], *ye received not the word of men, but as it is in truth, a word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*" You will notice that the word "received" occurs twice. There are two distinct words in the original; the first "received" implies that the Thessalonians had listened to Paul's remarks, the

second, that they had received them into their hearts. It was a great thing to get an attentive hearing; that had been obtained. It was a greater thing to have "the word" taken into the heart; and Paul could thank God without ceasing that such had been the case. The literal rendering of what is given as "*the word—which ye heard*" is 'a word of hearing.' You will find that rendering given in the margin of Heb. iv. 2, where the same word is used in the Greek. The Thessalonians heard a word from Paul's lips which went into their hearts. That word was sifted by them, and with grateful reverence they recognised it not only as Paul's—it did what Paul's word never could have done—but received it into their hearts as "*the word of God,*" which "*in truth*" it is. As has been well said, to them Paul was publisher, but God was Author. Paul rejoiced in the triumph of the Word. His converts proved themselves to be the true sheep, they knew the Good Shepherd's voice; and a deeper cause for gratitude arose—that word "*effectually worketh also in you that believe*"—they followed Him. In Heb. iv. 2, 'The word of hearing' did not profit, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it;" the word was powerless because of unbelief. Here it effectually worked. It was God's Word, obeyed, accepted, and rejoiced in. So God was glorified, these Thessalonians saved, and Paul used by his Maker. No wonder that he thanked God unceasingly; and those unceasing praises were proofs of his love. May God make such a bond here! May He give ministerial single-mindedness, ministerial consistency, ministerial tenderness and zeal in teaching, and thus cause hearers and preacher to rejoice together!

Lecture VII.

"For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."—I THESS. ii. 14-16.

WE have seen how St. Paul had led the minds of his readers back to the time when first they knew the Lord, and how he had reminded them of the messengers by whom they obtained that knowledge. We have heard his renewed thanks to God for the reception He had enabled them to give to the "word of hearing," and we now find him turning to the profession which they had made. God had called them to "His kingdom and glory," but the calling involved trouble,—*"much tribulation."* They heard, and became "followers of them who through faith and patience" inherited the promises. They were being tried with a fiery trial, and at that they were told to look. Let us do likewise, and with God's help see the *Persecution*, and the *Persecutors*.

I. THE PERSECUTION. That it was trying is evident from the fact that this is the second allusion to it. In

chap. i. 6 Paul reminded them that in following him and his co-labourers, they "received the word in much affliction." They had his example to sustain them then. Now, in his absence, he points to those like themselves, not Apostles or ministers (who might erroneously be supposed to have a higher standard before them), but ordinary Christians, the first believers. He reminds them that they "*became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus;*" they endured therefore the common lot. The Jewish Churches, you will notice, are not only "the churches of God," but they are His Churches "in Christ Jesus." There is a sense in which we may talk of the Jewish nation as the Jewish Church, but let us never overlook the grand distinction which St. Paul makes here, and in chap. i. 1; the Church inhabited by the Spirit is that which is "in Christ Jesus." These Hebrew Christians had been persecuted. Not at first; for they had "favour with all the people." But at last the difference appeared, and then the trouble began. Peter and John were sent home "beaten" for preaching Jesus and the Resurrection. Stephen was stoned, and men and women committed to prison. James was killed with the sword, and Peter put into the condemned cell. This was done by their own countrymen. Jews were fond of Jews, had reduced the word neighbour to mean Jew, and had altered the command to "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy;" but love of each other was burnt out by bigotry, kinsmanship was forgotten. These first believers suffered for being Christians from their brethren, the children of faithful Abraham. So with

these Thessalonians. They found themselves suspected and despised by their fellow-citizens. It was not without a severe pang that they felt their wrath, and they must therefore have been cheered by the commendation, "*Ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.*" The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, spoken of by God (Gen. iii. 15), was being realized here ; but how close it came, "your own countrymen." The great Captain had told His followers to expect this. His words in Matt. x. 21, 34-37, had prepared them for variance ; for strife in the very home, for foes in their own household. There is no change in the world's spirit ; the same thing happens now. Let a man leave off his sins and follies and resolve to serve the Lord, and even in civilized lands he will find variance and foes. Read Mission Reports, and you will see the violence and the opposition raging. Read in that much neglected but much needed book, Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," how it has raged under both Pagan and Papal superstition, and we may be prepared for what is coming. Things all point to a change in popular feeling about the Gospel. I do not say, I do not believe there is less real Christianity in our land than in days gone by, I believe there is more ; but I do say that the sentiments of the great multitude just outside are being changed. The recent writings in popular journals about the Bible ; the received acceptance of the proposed Sabbath desecration ; the abolition of even a belief in a personal God as a mark of our National Legislature ; the tampering with Popery, and the familiarizing our people with its mummeries and

doctrines, are all signs of coming difficulty, and bid us prepare, if need be, to become followers of the Thessalonian and Jewish Churches, of the Apostles, and the Lord.

II. Let us now see what is said about THE PERSECUTORS. Verses 15 and 16 have been called an invective against the Jews. Critics have been found who could not reconcile this with the sentiments in Rom. ix. 3; and yet it was just because their case was so desperate, and this invective so true, that the Apostle was impelled to the willingness to propose such a sacrifice. The Jews must always, whether we will or not, form a dark background to the Gospel. The Jews nowhere appear so evil as in St. John's Gospel; the "Sun of Righteousness" never shines out from behind so dark a cloud. And there was a cause for Paul's words. Though their own countrymen persecuted the Thessalonians, they were first provoked to the work by the Jews, and one of their biting jeers may have been, 'You are following a Jew whom the very Jews themselves abhor.' This needed explanation, and St. Paul gave it.

1. He tells them of the *past sin of the Jews*. "*The Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets.*" This was their great crime, they "*killed the Lord Jesus;*" it was their doing, though Roman hands and Roman nails were used; "for envy they delivered Him." When Pilate vainly tried to disclaim the act they boldly took it on themselves, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. xxvii. 24, 25); Cleophas and his friend journeying to Emmaus held that it was the "rulers" and "chief priests" who had

"delivered Him to be condemned to death," and crucified Him (Luke xxiv. 20); Peter charged the multitude on the day of Pentecost as well as the crowd in the Temple with the crime (Acts ii. 23; iii. 14, 15); and Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of having been His "betrayers and murderers." This was their great sin. It followed the course of the guilt of their fathers, who had killed their own prophets. As in the parable the shameful treatment and murder of the proprietor's messengers culminated in the husbandmen slaying the heir (Matt. xxi. 34-39), so it was here. The Jews of our Lord's day professed great reverence for the martyrs; but, in the costly sepulchres they built over their remains, the Eye of Omniscience saw their seal to the bloody, ungodly deeds (Matt. xxiii. 29-31); nay, He saw in them a desire to have a monopoly of guilt, "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke xiii. 33). But, if possible, they were guilty of a greater sin still. They did indeed kill the "Prince of Life;" but He, a willing victim, died for that nation, and having risen, sent to them the first offer of His mercy. His ambassadors were to tell all men of His love, but they were to begin at Jerusalem. In the fountain they themselves had so cruelly opened they were to be allowed to wash, and that *first*. But how did they treat this love? Oh, says Paul, they "*have persecuted us.*" They would not even hear of the manner of love, would not bear with the messengers. And, in this work, Paul himself had had a hand; he knew what it was both to give and take. The Jews with whom he had sided were now his chief opponents;

the details have been hidden from us, but when Paul wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he had "of the Jews five times received—forty stripes save one," five times endured the maximum penalty the synagogue could inflict. At Thessalonica the Christians had seen their fury (Acts xvii. 5), and while he was writing this Epistle he felt it himself. At Corinth they were 'opposing and blaspheming;' and, making "insurrection" against him, had dragged him before judge Gallio (Acts xviii. 6, 12, 13). Theirs was a triple sin. With a threefold lock they closed the door of grace against themselves. They killed the prophets who testified of Jesus; they killed the Lord Himself; and then chased and killed His ambassadors.

2. St. Paul next tells of the *present condition of the persecutors*. Their conduct had led to a habit and to a practice. The habit was, "*they please not God, and are contrary to all men.*" They *thought* they were pleasing God. As the Lord Jesus had foretold, they put His people out of the synagogue, and killed them, thinking that they did God service (John xvi. 2). They fell into the mistake exposed in Ps. l. 21; they thought that God was such an One as themselves. Persecution pleased them; Herod found that out, for he slew James, and it "*pleased the Jews.*" They thought it would please God too; but they did not please Him. He *can* make the wrath of man to please Him, but that is the work of over-ruling Providence. By their conduct they displeased Him, and no longer answered the design for which they existed as individual creatures, or as a nation.

Then they were "*contrary to all men.*" The Levitical law made the Jew unsocial. It was designed, by the restrictions it placed on food and the mode of its preparation, to make the Jew "dwell alone," separate from other men; and this made the nation disliked by all others. The Roman annalist Tacitus attributed their conduct to hatred of all other people; and their behaviour with regard to the Gospel made this hatred appear in the worst light. Had Christianity remained a Jewish sect, it might have been tolerated as Sadduceeism was. But when Jews, still claiming their national rights, were willing to admit Gentiles to an equal participation in blessings which they believed to do away with all merely Jewish privileges, this hatred knew no bounds. See how it comes out in Acts xxii. 21. Paul's hearers heard him defend himself on the Temple stairs while he explained his conversion and call. They even endured, in silence, reflections upon themselves; but the moment he explained the call, "I will send thee far hence unto the *Gentiles*," that word provoked a storm beyond his power to calm. Then exclusiveness shut the door against the Gentiles; they had become "*contrary to all men.*" Even converted Jews shared this feeling. It was found in those who murmured at Peter's visit to Cornelius; and in those who 'troubled' the Churches in Galatia and elsewhere with their exclusiveness. What a sad habit of mind for them to possess! They should have been a blessing. They were "*contrary to all men.*" This habit was evidenced by their practice; they were found "*forbidding—to speak to the Gentiles that they might be*

saved." They knew the Gentiles were sinners, in danger, that a word of salvation was meant for them; yet they forbade its utterance. A door was opened by which heaven could be reached. They tried to close it. They not only would not go in themselves, but those who were entering in they hindered (Matt. xxiii. 13; Luke xi. 52).

3. St. Paul now goes on to describe the *persecutors' doom*, "*To fill up their sins alway.*" God, so to speak, waits for the hour of judgment. The day is a long one, because He gives men time to repent. Abraham had to wait for centuries for the land God gave to him, because "the iniquity of the Amorites" was not "full" (Gen. xv. 16); judgment did not fall on Jerusalem till the Jews had filled up the measure of their fathers (Matt. xxiii. 32). So there was still an opportunity. The vessel might have been emptied, but the hands were busy, ever busy the other way. They were always filling up their sins, and *then* must come the doom. As the cup is filling Paul reads the doom, "*The wrath is come upon them to the uttermost;*" "*is come,*" for the sentence had gone out. The clouds were already gathering; just as, in "the matter of Korah," Moses saw that wrath had gone out from the Lord, and bid Aaron at once go and stand between living and dead to stay the plague (Numb. xvi. 46). But here the High Priest was rejected, and the wrath must come. That High Priest had wept over them, 'How often would I have gathered you, but ye would not!' Therefore the enemy must come and cast their trench, compass round, and keep in on every side, and then lay the city, over which

Jesus wept, even with the ground, not leaving one stone on another, but burying the inhabitants in the awful ruin. "Wrath to the uttermost"! The natural branches of the olive-tree of God's own planting were to be cut off, '*not spared*' (Luke xix. 43, 44; Rom. xi. 21, 22). But though here St. Paul stops in this Epistle, he has elsewhere told us that the "uttermost" here spoken of has a limit in human measurement. Dark as is the blindness, it is only "blindness in part" which has "happened to Israel" (Rom. xi. 25). Their lost estate is our opportunity; through their fall, salvation is come to us Gentiles (verse 11); "The branches were broken off" that we "might be grafted in" (verse 19). And they are in a position now to be benefited by our effort. In time past we believed not God, yet have "obtained mercy through their unbelief. Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy" (verses 30, 31). Put this effort forth, use the Jews' Society and every other means to reach those who now please not God; and, when they are gathered in, prepare for blessings. Do weigh those solemn words: "If the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (verses 12, 15.) The wrath will have been endured, its purpose answered. No longer will it be said that "they please not God, and are contrary to all men." Jew and Gentile will taste together the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Lecture VIII.

"But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again ; but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."—I THESS. ii. 17-20.

THESE words are a striking contrast to those just preceding. If there were Jews who hated the Gentiles, despised, and withheld the knowledge of God's love from them, there were also Jews who were constrained, by the love of that Greatest of all Jews—Jesus of Nazareth—to spare no effort to "preach the Gospel to every creature," even though so doing involved pain, difficulty, and death. Do not, therefore, hate the nation. Let them be "beloved for the fathers' sakes," for their sakes through whom the glad news of the Gospel first sounded out on Gentile ears.

The Epistle here takes a little turn. The Apostle is still dealing with what we have called the historical part, but hitherto he has been writing facts which the Thessalonian Christians could corroborate, for they had been done in their presence ; now, he tells them of what had taken place in his absence from them. This was news to them, gratifying, encouraging news. In the verses now before us he groups what he has to say under

three heads—I. *Separation* ; II. *Effort* ; III. *Consolation*. May God help us by His Spirit to meditate aright !

I. A SEPARATION. To understand and appreciate this Epistle we must have ever before us the seventeenth of Acts. There we are told about the sudden end of the Apostle's useful ministry at Thessalonica. *The separation was a very sad one*, it was the parting of those who had become deeply attached to each other. The word here used means a great deal more than separation ; "But we, brethren, being taken from you," hardly conveys the Apostle's idea. The word literally means 'being bereaved as orphans,' and though the loss sustained by the Thessalonians was great, it was not their loss of which St. Paul speaks ; no, it was his own. He says '*we* (not you) being bereaved.' He recollected well that night when he and Silas were sent away so hurriedly without any formal farewell ; he shows how fully he understood the nursing-mother's love (verse 7), and the loving father's gentle yet firm care (verse 11). He had been not merely driven to a new field of labour from a place and people he had become attached to ; no, more than this. In one who had few natural ties a heavy heart was beating ; he had been wrested from those he loved, and felt over again Jacob's sorrow when that patriarch was bereaved of his children.

One comfort had been that *the separation would be a short one*, so short that the literal rendering is 'for an hour.' When the tempest was passed he

would return ; and it would soon be over. But even from an inspired Apostle God hid his future ; to Paul as to John He said, " If I will,—what is that to thee ? follow thou Me." In mercy, God hid the future from him, as from us. Had he known how long the separation was to last he would have been disheartened. We have to thank God for what He hides, as well as for what He reveals. Our own experience has shown us how much worse evils are in anticipation than in reality, and so Paul was allowed to go on under the hope that his bereavement was only 'for an hour.' It really lasted five years. The first we hear of his revisiting Macedonia is in Acts xx. 1, 2, and before that we read of "a year and six months" stay in Corinth, whence he wrote this letter (Acts xviii. 11), and then of "a good while" after that (verse 18); then of a visit to Jerusalem, a journey through Galatia and Phrygia (verses 22, 23), and then of two years in Ephesus. What a long hour ! but now, when looked back upon, it is but as a moment.

Another comfort was that *the absence was only bodily*. I am bereaved, but only "*in presence, not in heart.*" There was a sense in which he was with them still, just as he was with the Colossians, whose face he had never seen in the flesh, yet with whom he was "in the spirit, joying and beholding their order, and the stedfastness of their faith in Christ." The Communion of Saints is helped by the senses, but it can exist without their use. "The throne of grace" is the centre of communion ; there,

"Though sunder'd far, by faith they meet."

There Paul met his friends,

"And time and sense [were] all no more."

A third comfort was that *the separation was an unwilling one*. St. Paul's wish was again to 'see their face.' The impression those faces had made was so new that he yearned to see the originals again, yea, "with great desire." The greatness of the desire was shown in its activity. The Apostle says, we "*endeavoured the more abundantly*" to return. It was not a mere longing,—the "desire of Slothful," who nevertheless "hath not"—he was watching for an opportunity, and when one offered he eagerly availed himself of it. Paul's endeavours were quite the opposite of the slothful man's. As he told the Corinthians, when he was minded he never used "lightness;" for his purpose being once made, there was no "yea, yea, and nay, nay" (2 Cor. i. 16, 17). It was no fault of his that the bereavement continued; it was God's purpose, and His will must be done.

II. Paul next speaks of AN EFFORT. The desire he had to meet them had become vehement, and had ended in effort. He had laid plans to come, though they might think that he had neglected them. Timothy (who had stayed behind when Paul and Silas had been hurried away) had returned to them; perhaps Silas had also. So St. Paul writes, "Wherefore [because we had this desire] we would have come unto you, even I Paul." "I wanted to do so, nay, more than this, I tried to do so, and I tried twice, "*once and again*." I had arranged for the journey (no easy matter in those days), and twice I was disappointed, my plans all fell through.'

The effort, then, was a *hindered effort*. Paul was only a servant; he had to do the will of another; he

was the "slave of Jesus Christ." Thus when he would have gone on preaching the word in Asia, the Holy Ghost forbade; and when he "assayed to go into Bithynia," the Spirit suffered him not (Acts xvi. 6, 7). Again, he was "hindered" by God's Providence. We have an instance in 1 Cor. xvi. 6, 7. The work God had put before him at Ephesus was a providential hindrance to work elsewhere, at any rate, "until Pentecost." Again, he was "hindered" in some schemes by the principle he had laid down to guide him in his mission-work. To this he refers in Rom. xv. 19-24. He could not come to Rome; nay, he was "much hindered from coming," because other lips had preached there, and laid 'foundations,' and there were regions where the Lord Jesus had not yet been "spoken of." But the hindrance here alluded to arose from neither of these three causes. Neither Paul's principle of action, nor God's Providence, nor the Spirit's voice prevented the longed-for return. No, this time "*Satan hindered us*;" it was 'the Adversary's' doing, the work of that personal foe who had attacked both the first and second Adam. He had hindered, and had been allowed to hinder, Paul. *How*, we are not told, and it is not easy to conjecture. It was worth Satan's while to prevent the Apostle from revisiting Thessalonica, it was worth his while to keep out an Apostle from preaching, and he succeeded in doing so. That he defeated his own ends we need not doubt; for his seeming victory resulted in this letter, which would do more good by its permanence than the spoken words would have done, a good lasting till now. What his instruments were we know not.

They may have been wicked men, his children, 'sons of Belial;' or it may have been that "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan," with which St. Paul was buffeted (2 Cor. xii. 7). At any rate, the issue of the struggle was, the way to Thessalonica was twice blocked up successfully, and Satan's hindrances prolonged Paul's bereavement. Such hindrances may happen now. When "the prince of this world cometh" he findeth something even in Paul on which he can work; he will find it in us too. We must struggle on; and, if not allowed to do the work to which we think God has called us, and Satan be the hinderer, this is only permitted because our unfitness has disqualified us for the task.

III. Paul next speaks of A CONSOLATION.

This was needed, and God gave it. It was a balm for his wound after the struggle with the Adversary. The people he could not reach afforded it, "*For what is our hope?*" "Are not even ye?" He remembered what they were before he met them; he remembered how very unlike an ambassador he had been when he arrived among them, but how in spite of this they had heard, believed, and followed. Their constancy sustained him. Amid trying scenes at Corinth they stood fast, and by so doing invigorated his hope. They were his "*hope.*" We never read that he said this of any other converts, and indeed Paul tells Timothy that Jesus is "*our hope;*" and therefore, though less noble than those in Berea, these Christians must have been very eminent, and so long as they were found looking

for God's Son from heaven, His image must have been so reflected on them that Paul saw Christ in them, "the hope of glory."

They were his "*joy*." The Apostle, amid all his sorrows, was a happy man; of himself he says, "Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." If Corinth depressed him, Thessalonica with its happy memories encouraged him, and drove away his sorrow, replacing it with joy. Look at the depth of that joy as described in chap. iii. 9, when he thanks God for Macedonian sunshine, "for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God"! There is no joy like the joy arising from usefulness in Christ's cause. The Seventy came back filled with it, and for a while shared the joy which sparkles in the presence of God over the repenting sinner. It is the joy John felt when he saw his children "walking in truth." It is the joy into which we are to enter at last. Heaven is to be filled with joy, but it is God's joy; the fulness of that joy of Christ which we get here ("These things have I spoken unto you, that *My joy* might remain in you"); the '*joy of our Lord*,' into which the faithful servant shall enter. No wonder we pray "that at the last we may come to *His* eternal joy."

They were his "*crown of rejoicing*." We sometimes see pictures of our Lord and His Apostles with a halo round their heads. They probably need that to be distinguished in the picture, though they had nothing of that kind in reality. Paul, however, speaks figuratively as if he had some such spiritual crown. It was not his apostolic commission, nor his varied gifts, nor

his labours, nor his eloquence, nor his burning zeal; no, his "crown of rejoicing" was saved sinners, sinners brought to Christ through his means. Oh, what a crown! It never fades. Its lustre never dies. How poor all earthly gifts and distinctions will look "*in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming*"! How poor even all spiritual attainments, because they fall so far short of "what we shall be"! How poor much work done here will look when that day reveals it! (1 Cor. iii. 13.) But one crown shall sparkle in the very beams of the Sun of Righteousness, the crown composed of souls won for Christ; and Paul will have that crown then. Let each of us imitate him in his labour, and get a little of his joy, and a crown of the same kind, however small. Let there be some who, when we fail (die, suffer eclipse), may "receive" us "into everlasting habitations" (Luke xvi. 9).

The Thessalonian converts were to be his hope, joy, crown of rejoicing *then*. What were they when Paul was writing? "*Ye are our glory and joy.*" "*Our glory,*" for you show what the Gospel can do; you are trophies won by the King of kings; the workmanship of God, "*created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*" "*Our glory,*" for God hath used us to effect this marvellous change; you show what God can do, and with what instruments. Our "*joy*" now, for already the work is done, the condemnation *now* exists not, the pardon has come, the Spirit has been given. The end is coming. You *are* our "*joy.*" Nothing short of this can satisfy the Christian minister. A full church, attentive hearers, are gratifying and encouraging, but

they are not "our glory and joy." Numerous communicants and active workers are precious gifts, but they are not "our glory and joy." These are only outside marks which an unrenewed heart may put on. They are a fading crown at best. But 'turning to God,' 'serving the living and true God,' 'waiting for His Son from heaven,' the Son Who has delivered us from the "wrath to come," that is real work, that is the Holy Ghost's doing. Oh, may nothing else content either you or me!

Alas! that it is so seldom realized. How often had Paul to weep over many who were the "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. iii. 18, 19); and, who can tell what it cost him to write that sad appeal to the Corinthians? (2 Cor. xii. 20, 21.) There was no crown of rejoicing there. No; "When I come again, my God will humble me among you."

May God help me so to preach, and you so to hear, that you may be my hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. God help us all!

Lecture IX.

"Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."—I THESS. iii. 1-8.

WHAT a man prizes, especially what a man calls his glory and joy, he will long to see; and failing to see it, he will long to hear about it. St. Paul now goes on to tell his friends what he did in the absence of opportunity of seeing them, and the comfort he got accordingly. In doing this he mentions four things—I. The *sacrifice* he made; II. The *messenger* he sent; III. The *work* the messenger had to do; and IV. The messenger's *report*.

I. THE SACRIFICE HE MADE.

He was *driven* to make it, "*We could no longer forbear;*" he was like a vessel which could hold no more. When he heard of their troubles and persecutions, thought of their weakness, and found himself effectually hindered from coming to them, he was in great distress, and felt he must do something to satisfy his cravings and their wants. So here was the need of a sacrifice; he must send one to supply his lack of service, to minister in his stead.

This was a *real sacrifice*, for it involved his being left alone. You know what a craving Paul had for society, and how he always looked for associates and worked with them. You recollect how he valued the kindly visit of Onesiphorus (2 Tim. i. 16, 18). You can bear in mind how he urges Titus (iii. 12, 13) to come to him to Nicopolis, and to bring Zenas and Apollos. You see how he felt his loneliness in the second imprisonment to be one of his keenest pangs; for he tells Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 9) to do his "diligence to come" to him quickly, for Demas had departed from fear or love of the world, Crescens and Titus had gone away on duty, and "only Luke is with me." To be left alone, therefore, was a sore trial. But he had the love he himself commended and described (1 Cor. xiii. 5), which "seeketh not her own." Their needs were greater than his, so he "*thought it good*" to be "*left alone.*"

The sacrifice is greater, too, if you remember the scene where he made it. It was "at Athens." There his spirit had been stirred within him by the sights and sounds of an idolatry to which the city was wholly

given. His public appeal had been permitted by scoffing curiosity, and the *élite* of Athens had come together to enjoy a laugh at the "babbler's" expense. The Gospel, therefore, was "foolishness to them," and it was most likely when smarting from this unexpected defeat that Timothy arrived to cheer him. Their communion was to be but short. Thessaly wanted comfort more than he did, so every private feeling was set aside; "When we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone."

II. THE MESSENGER HE SENT.

We "*sent Timotheus.*" This youthful minister, nurtured in a godly household, converted by Paul at Lystra, and a willing follower, the young man, who was a constant companion and comfort to him, and who knew the Thessalonians well (because he not only had seen and taken part in the apostolic "entrance" unto them, but had been able also to stay behind when Paul and Silas had been sent away), was the messenger. The Apostle sent on the loved one, they knew. He calls him "*our brother.*" This was to give force and dignity to his mission; those who felt disposed to 'despise his youth' would receive with respect Paul's "brother." You will note this consideration of St. Paul. When writing to Timothy he calls him "my son," "my own son in the faith." In describing him to the Philippians (ii. 19, 22), he combines the two descriptions, "As a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel;" and so also to the Corinthians (1 Cor. iv. 17), "My beloved son, and

faithful in the Lord." The messenger has however a nobler title still. This second verse has suffered from interpolations; the word "*minister*" is wanting in the best MSS., and so are the words "*and our*" after "God." They were possibly added because some thought it was too great a liberty or familiarity to say of any one that he was '*a fellow-labourer of God.*' But this is what Paul termed Timothy. Where God invites it is true humility to go; but where He has not invited never go. Respect this feeling so far as to keep within Scriptural limits in your way of speaking about God. Some make great mistakes here. The late Robert Hall said of one, a good woman, that she spoke of God as though He were her neighbour. Beware of using familiar terms. John lay on the Saviour's bosom, Paul had abundance of revelation, but see how they both speak of Jesus. They never called Him '*our dear Lord.*' We are bid to come with boldness to "the throne of grace;" but we are also told to "have grace" to "serve Him with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. iv. 16 and xii. 28). Timothy was really '*a fellow-labourer with God.*' The term is used elsewhere (1 Cor. iii. 9), "We are labourers together with God," and (2 Cor. vi. 1) "workers together with Him." What an honour! Yet "such honour have all His saints." And what a comfort! He works with us. We are like the disciples spoken of in St. Mark xvi. 20; the Lord has gone into heaven, His followers are working everywhere, but there He is "working with them." How strange nevertheless that history has not verified the opinion

of St. Paul about Timothy! No mark on the Church has been left by him, and but for Paul's love he would probably never have been heard of. You will notice the sphere in which Timothy was God's "fellow-labourer." Though grand, it is limited; it is "*in the Gospel of Christ*." That is the only sphere where for all purposes of moral improvement God will work. In the work of creation He did all Himself. In the work of new creation He invites man's co-operation, and in the Gospel of Christ honours man by employing him.

III. Let us notice THE WORK THE MESSENGER HAD TO DO.

It was well defined, "*To establish you*." The Thessalonians wanted strengthening. Earthly props had been removed, many storms raged round them; they needed help. So Timothy was sent to do what Jonathan did to David when hunted by Saul (1 Sam. xxiii. 16), he "strengthened his hand in God;" he was to say to them what David had said to himself in Ps. xlii. and xliii. Then he was "to comfort you concerning your faith." You will see once again how skilfully St. Paul alludes to their spiritual state. They have "faith," but still he implies that it needs attention and encouragement. When they left their idols to serve "the living and true God," they looked for His Son from heaven, but instead of a returning King and a glorious kingdom they had met with tribulation. Their faith was tried by this, and Timothy was to set them right. He could not drive away the tribulation, or stop the persecution, but he could encourage their

faith, and this he would do, for Paul had laid down the line of teaching Timothy was to adopt. Complete comfort would follow, "*that no man should be moved by these afflictions.*" Not "moved." The word is a peculiar word, it implies the easiest of motions, the wag of a dog's tail; not be moved even so much as that by afflictions. And what was to secure this? Not the reflection that they were transitory and only for a little while. That was a cogent argument, it is elsewhere employed; but though it could comfort, it would not prevent 'moving.' Nor does the Apostle dwell on the salutary effect of the affliction. In Heb. xii. 11 the peaceable fruits of righteousness are set off against the "chastening;" but even that will not prevent 'moving.' So St. Paul falls back on the purposes of God, "*Yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*" "Appointed"! It is part of the discipline of a loving Father, part of the plan of the great Head of the Church; an appointment in which both preacher and hearer, Apostle and disciple, share, "We are appointed." It is God's doing, so do not be moved. As good Burkitt says, "There is a decree of God concerning them; a decree as to the matter of them, as to the manner of them, as to the measure of them, as to the time of them; when they shall commence, how far they shall advance, how long they shall continue." In our changed circumstances, when affliction comes without persecution, this can comfort us as much as it comforted them. He Who sends the trouble will control it, sanctify it, and terminate it, therefore let us not "be moved;" "God shall help" us, "and that right

early." It was not the first time they had heard of this appointment, "*For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation.*" How true that he had used no "flattering words" (ii. 5), and how truly he had trodden in his Master's steps! When Jesus had seen great multitudes following Him, He warned them that following involved a cross, and bid those who would follow "count the cost" (Luke xiv. 25-28). He told the scribe, who volunteered to follow Him 'whithersoever He went,' that He had not where to lay His head (Matt. viii. 19, 20). Paul had always taught the same truth. "Tribulation" is the way to the kingdom (Acts xiv. 22); it is given to you "not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. i. 29). Like Peter, he had told his hearers that tribulation was no strange thing, and they remembered his word. Now they had found this part of his teaching true, "*Even as it came to pass, and ye know.*" They had seen Paul, their spiritual father, suffering; they shared his grief now in practical experience. Let them share his joy too. If God had appointed the cross, He had also appointed the crown.

When Timothy had comforted and encouraged them by telling them of God's appointment, his work was not done; Paul wanted comfort too. Not from God's appointment, *that* he had, but from the report Timothy should bring of these men's stability. Were they standing fast? He says, 'While I felt for *you* I had my own uneasiness too, "*For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest*

by some means the tempter have tempted you ;” the Devil, the old Tempter, he who assailed Eve and Adam, he who attacked God’s Son, was sure to have been at you.’ He had hindered the Shepherd, he would certainly have been worrying the flock ; and what had been the result ? Had they resisted like their Lord, or had they yielded like their first parents ? Paul wanted to know, and Timothy goes to find out whether they were still steadfast, or whether “*our labour be in vain.*” What a loss if it were so ! The labour of ii. 3-9 all for nothing ! Could it be ? The hope extinct, the joy gone, the crown faded, the confession which had made him rejoice, had it been forgotten ? And the profession which had spread so far and wide, was it now to be a reproach ? Was Paul to realize the sad lot of him who has built unwisely on the good foundation ? Was his work wood, hay, stubble, and as such to be manifest in that day, when the fire would try and then burn it ? (1 Cor. iii. 12-15.) Timothy would bring back the news to him.

IV. We have now to see THE MESSENGER’S REPORT.

It was *eminently satisfactory*. “*Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings.*” There was no sorrow in either look or word when he rejoined St. Paul ; he came with a gospel. The very word is used which is in St. Luke ii. 10 put into the angels’ lips when they told the shepherds of the new-born Saviour ; glad tidings indeed, for they told of strong, steadfast, unmoved *faith*, still, as months before, joined by *love*. The storm had burst and passed over

them, but they were still standing. The good foundation had been well built on.

The report was *gratifying* to Paul personally. The converts had "good remembrance" of him "always." He had raised no false hopes; and they had not been misled. They still thanked God for the Apostle He had sent. They felt, too, that they had nothing to hide from Paul, they could look him in the face, and they wanted to do so; Timothy had left them "*desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you.*" Their craving was as great as his; if he longed to see his spiritual children, they longed to see their spiritual parent.

It was a *comforting* report. When it reached Paul he was at Corinth, meeting with opposition and discouragement, "*We were,*" he says, "*in affliction and distress.*" At such a moment Timothy arrived. New life was given to the Apostle by their *faith*, he was '*comforted over them.*' They were monuments of God's grace, still there to show what God could do, and they stirred him up to fresh effort. We read in Acts xviii. 5 that when "Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ;" and just as old Jacob, incredulous at first at the report of Joseph's life and grandeur, had every doubt removed by the proof of Joseph's love,—for "when he saw the wagons" his soul revived (Gen. xlv. 27),—so this news gave fresh life to Paul, and he says, showing how linked he was to them, "For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." Yes, they were well called his "glory and joy;" they had met the fiery trial, had stood it, and were ready for more.

Lecture X.

"For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."—I THESS. iii. 9-13.

ST. PAUL's delight at hearing of the good spiritual health of the Thessalonians is detailed in the verses which were under consideration in the previous lecture. These verses contain the further expression of his gratitude. When at Athens, he had passed through much anxiety, and had made a great sacrifice, but he had reaped precious fruit. He 'lived' (verse 8). These verses tell of the threefold shape his *gratitude* took.

I. THANKSGIVING TO GOD.

There was no fulsome flattery to them, no congratulations to them on their need, strength, and steadfastness; no glorying in his own work. No, the work is all ascribed "*to God*," and to Him must all the glory be. So deeply did Paul feel the power and goodness of God in this matter, that he was enabled to

say what he felt: "*What thanks can we render to God again for you?*" It is the idea of Ps. cxvi. 12 over again, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" What am I able to say? He had tried. Too often our gratitude is defective, not so much from inability to express it, as from neglect and want of effort. With Paul his very language here shows the depth of his gratitude, "*For all the joy wherewith we joy,*" the repetition of the word joy reveals the depth of his feelings. Analyze his joy. Was there not the *labourer's joy*? He was now "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," his labour had not been in vain after all; it had stood the test of separation and trial, and he had the good workman's joy. Then there was the *father's joy*. He had done the work of a father, 'exhorting, comforting, and charging' (ii. 11), and they were walking "worthy of God;" he had the joy St. John spoke of when he said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). Next, he had the *mother's joy*. He had been as a nursing-mother to them, and now he has all a mother's joy when he finds his spiritual offspring safe, strong, and prospering. And last, he had an *Apostle's joy*, 'the seal of his apostleship' they were in the Lord. They were still his joy and crown, parts of the 'talents' he had been enabled to gain, and who would contribute to his "well done" at last. With all this joy he joyed, and what thanks could he give? Notice, before we pass on, the *unselfishness* of his joy; it was "*before God*" and "*for your sakes.*" He lived because they stood fast, he joyed because they had such cause for rejoic-

ing. It was like the unselfish joy which fills heaven "over one sinner that repenteth," a joy not merely among the angels but in their presence, where they are, the joy of God Himself. Yes, it was as Jesus had said, *His* joy was in Paul, and Paul's 'joy was full' (John xv. 11).

II. But this was not all. Paul reveals a DESIRE FOR FURTHER EFFORT.

He did not say, 'Now that I have this good news, I need take no more trouble about these young converts. I will leave them to God's kind care, and they are sure to be safe.' No, he felt that their safety was, under God, made to depend on his effort, and that effort he desired to make. He makes it first of all at "the throne of grace," "*Night and day praying exceedingly.*" What an example for us! Our prayers and intercessions, how feeble, cold, constrained, and brief they are! How sadly they compare with Paul's "night and day"! Of course we are not meant to be unreal, nor to suppose (what is contrary to fact) that Paul really was night and day on his knees praying. What he means is his converts were so deeply in his thoughts that they occupied his sleeping and waking hours; and that he had them ever on his mind in prayer. We can pray without the kneeling posture, without words. Let us get into the habit of not only praying earnestly at our set times, but also of "continuing instant in prayer." This prayer was happy work *now*. Before Timothy came, anxiety drove him to the throne of grace, now joy attracts him there.

St. Paul wanted this effort to be direct, "*that we might see your face.*" He still tried to get to them, and prayed that he might. This was right. Had God hindered by His Providence, or had the Holy Spirit 'suffered him not' to go, then he must have said, "Thy will be done;" but as it was Satan who hindered, he was right in striving still. Their steadfastness gave a new impulse to his wishes. He wanted to share their joy, to give and to receive some spiritual gift. How wise to take this fervent desire to God, "*praying exceedingly*" over it! He was thus the better able to bear the disappointment his long absence would cause.

The Apostle was anxious to *benefit them*. He had commended their faith in that it was accompanied by a "labour of love," and because it was so well known and so genuine (i. 3, 8; ii. 13). But what Timothy had told of their faith, even though it had been "good tidings," had revealed a need. One of the reasons for which he desired to come was that he "*might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.*" The faith was deficient. It was strong, but not strong enough; clear, but might be clearer. It wanted, like ours, increasing. What the deficiencies are we are left to conjecture, but we have a guide in chap. iv. It seems to have lacked the sanctifying effect it should have had. Sinful desires appear to have been indulged in as in the days of idolatry, and the converts had not clear views about the state of the blessed dead and of the Lord's return. Paul was abundantly answered. The Epistle went a long way to rectify these defects. By it he reached ears and hearts craving for those

truths not only then, but now ; not only in Thessalonica, but everywhere. What he did when he visited them we are not told ; what he did when he could not visit them shines as the sacred page of God's Word for our admonition. Paul has long since ceased to mourn over Satan's hindrance. It became God's golden opportunity, and led to the series of apostolic Epistles.

III. The third thing Paul did was FORMAL PRAYER.

He gives us here a pattern of his daily prayer for them. In some MSS. an 'Amen' appears at the end of verse 13, an indication apparently that this prayer was used in public worship with needful changes and omissions. Notice that this prayer is threefold.

1. *For Paul and the people.* Here you see the point so deeply graven on St. Paul's heart ; may God "*direct our way to you.*" He did not know of the better thing provided, so he, judging his presence necessary, still prayed on. With Satan hindering God must direct ; He must make straight and plain what the Adversary blocks up. This prayer is remarkable from the address it bears, "*Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*" It is addressed to both God the Father, and God the Son. A better rendering of the invocation would be, 'Now our God and Father Himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ.' The doctrinal bearing of this is plain. We may address the Lord Jesus in prayer, and that too while we speak to the Father ; Jesus is God. But there is more than appears in our English version. We have nothing to mark the

difference between singular and plural in the tense in which the word "direct" appears, and might therefore think that the verb following two nouns would be plural. In the Greek it is different, and the verb "direct" is singular. Here again we have an incidental proof of the unity of the Persons in the Godhead. The Father and the Son are One.

2. Paul next prays *for the whole Thessalonian Church*, "*The Lord make you to increase.*" The increase prayed for may be numerical; that the Lord should add to them, so that they might increase in numbers daily. Or, it may refer to the spiritual increase, the increase that God giveth, the increase of 'faith, hope, and love,' by which the Church should, through "the effectual working in the measure of every part, [make] increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. iv. 16). Their life was to be proved by their growth. Then Paul's prayer was that they should "*abound in love one toward another.*" Love was to be in them, 'shed abroad of the Holy Ghost;' and then it was to spread, like the oil on Aaron's head, all over the garment, "toward one another." Love, and nothing short of love, toward each other was to distinguish Christ's disciples. All men were to know them by the mark, that they had "love one to another" (John xiii. 35). These Thessalonians had been taught that lesson by God Himself (1 Thess. iv. 9). St. Peter writes that "unfeigned love of the brethren" is the sign of a purified soul's obedience to the truth "through the Spirit" (1 Peter i. 22); and St. John says that it is an infallible sign of regeneration, "We know that we

have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John iii. 14). Have we this love, when so many of us never even speak to each other? Cultivate this grace more, for it can grow; it is to "*abound*," and not to the members of God's family only, no, to all men, to our very enemies. "Let it abound," says St. Paul, "even as we do toward you," like the love of chap. ii. 6-18,—the love given by God—so active, or we had never preached; so strong, or we should not now be writing.

3. The Apostle then prays *for each individual*. The whole body could only be perfect when each individual member was able to do, and was doing, its part; so each one is now prayed for. And the Apostle prays for their *holiness*. This was his final aim. Holiness is indispensable, without it no man can see the Lord. In it, and in its beauties, David's Son and David's Lord clothes His willing people in the day of His power. The Thessalonians must have it, and Paul prays to this end. But there must be no mistake as to this holiness. It is to be in "*your hearts*." It is not a mere outside work, not the parting from a bad habit while the fountain from which it comes is flowing still, not the lopping off a branch while the root exists from which it may grow again; no, the *heart* is to be holy. The Saviour does not throw His spotless righteousness on an uncleansed soul, "The King's daughter is all glorious within;" the heart is sanctified, and the life becomes holy. The holiness is not something put on, it is something put in. This holiness too is to be no transient emotion, no half-kept resolution, abandoned

when the excitement or reason which created it has died ; no, it is to be abiding. So St. Paul prayed that God would *stablish* their hearts. The holiness must distinguish believers alike on Sunday and week-day, in prayer and at work. It must depend not on what is around, but on that which is within. The cleansed heart is not to be "empty," but "an habitation of God through the Spirit." This will stablish us indeed. The prayer does not stop here, St. Paul describes the quality of the holiness in which hearts are to be stablished ; it is to be "*unblameable*." The holiness is to be without fault. Is this possible ? Ought we to ask that question ? Has not God said, "Be ye holy, even as I am holy" ? At any rate let us "follow after," that we "may apprehend that for which" we are "apprehended of Christ Jesus." The higher we aim, the higher we shall hit. Paul further prays that the heart holiness may be blameless "*before God*." It is comparatively easy to be holy before men, they are partial judges, and cannot see far in ; but, to be holy before Him in Whose sight the very "heavens are not clean," can this be ? "*Before God, even our Father* ;" the Father Who has to correct His wandering children ? Why not ? We do our works before Him (i. 3). The exalted Lord has it against Sardis, "I have not found thy works perfect before God." And this blamelessness shall be the portion of Christ's Bride, for He will "present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27) ; yea, He will present it "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24), and that "*at the coming of our Lord*

Jesus Christ with all His saints." Then the Thessalonian converts shall not only be Paul's "crown of rejoicing," but also Christ's in that great and glorious day. Not the day spoken of in chap. iv. Then He comes *for* His saints. The day of their spotless holiness will be when He comes *with* them; the day of which Enoch spoke; the day spoken of in Rev. xix., when the Redeemer's armies will follow Him "in fine linen, clean and white,—the righteousness of saints." What a glorious ending! What an answer to the Apostle's prayer! Let us add to it our believing 'Amen.'

Lecture XI.

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, Who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."—I THESS. iv. 1-12.

THIS is the commencement of the second great division of the Epistle. St. Paul has hitherto been dealing with matters of fact, with history, part of which the Thessalonian Christians could corroborate, and part of which was new to them. Now he proceeds to exhort them, and thus passes from the historical to the

hortatory part of the Epistle. You will recollect the high standard Paul had in his mind (see iii. 13), and the fact that there were some very important things lacking in the faith of his readers. You remember his desire was to visit them, but, this being impossible, he does the next best thing, and by means of pen and ink does what he cannot do by word of mouth; he sends them this weighty letter. The fourth and fifth chapters are occupied in dealing with the defects. Two of them—one affecting their life, the other affecting their death—are dealt with at length, and then follow short, pointed, needful words of exhortation. To-day we shall deal with the matter in the first twelve verses of this fourth chapter, which contain—I. A *general exhortation*; II. A *sin prohibited*; III. A *duty enforced*. May God help us rightly to deal with a somewhat difficult passage!

I. THE GENERAL EXHORTATION.

It is founded on what has been already said. "*Furthermore then*" would better be rendered "For the rest." It is equivalent to our 'Well then, since what I have said is so, listen to what naturally follows.'

See how powerfully the Apostle introduces the subject. He addresses his readers as "*brethren*." Here he bears testimony to their rapid spiritual growth. Only a few months ago they had been as babes, and he as 'their nursing-mother,' they as children, and he their father; but now they had developed so far that he puts them on a level with himself. He calls them "*brethren*." They are *men*. The language used, there-

fore, fits men, "*We beseech you, and exhort.*" The literal meaning of the word rendered "beseech" is 'ask;' but, it is apparently most frequently used in Scripture, when something is asked for which may be reasonably expected. It is a favourite word of St. Paul's at this time; he uses it again in v. 12, and 2 Thess. ii. 1. The "exhort" implies encouragement. There is in it an appeal to their Christian manhood. This gives the introduction a power which is heightened by the formula "*by the Lord Jesus,*" that is, not for His sake, but rather in His stead. Everything is done here to attract attention.

Then see what a *reasonable exhortation* it is. It is grounded on what they had already done, "*As ye have received of us.*" Paul's mind went back to the "manner of entering in" he had enjoyed, and the time when they had received a 'word of hearing' not as his word, but as "the word of God." 'What then,' he says, 'you did once, do again.' Then he grounds it on their own sense of duty. You have felt and known, "*how ye ought to walk and to please God.*" They had realized their duty. It consisted not only in what they *said*, but in what they *did*; the feet as well as the lips were to be consecrated, for they had learned that they were to "*please God.*" Not merely, mark, to satisfy conscience, or to fill up some painful requirements, but to please the heart-searching holy God. To please Him is not impossible. It is not only His beloved Son, or Enoch, that can do it; these Thessalonians could, and so may we. St. Paul pointed out the way. Not by painful austerities, torturing, or starving the body for the sin of the soul;

but by doing good and distributing for Christ's sake, "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." He tried to do (ii. 4) what the unconverted Jews with all their outward service never did (ii. 15), and what those who are "in the flesh" cannot do (Rom. viii. 8). The Thessalonians felt that they *ought* to do this, and what is more, they did it; for the best MSS. supply the words, "even as also ye do" after the words "*please God.*" Their faith, their waiting, their patient waiting, pleased God.

Look, then, at the exhortation, "*Abound more and more.*" They were to grow in grace. There was to be holiness, heart holiness, steadfast holiness, blameless holiness, and that before God, and the Lord Jesus at His coming. They were to aim high and never to be content; the most advanced Christian was still a long way off from what he ought to be, so Paul exhorts, "abound more and more." This abounding was not a matter for their choice, it was a commandment given by the Lord Jesus, "*Ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.*" We have need in these days to remember this. Men are apt to excuse themselves from 'abounding more and more' by talking about a *higher Christian life*, as though it were something only attainable by a few, and required a peculiar atmosphere. The Lord Jesus speaks through Paul to every follower. He has not two Christianities, one for the few and privileged, the other for the many and the common; all stand on the same level, and all should attain the same blameless holiness. For to show that this is without any exception, Paul quotes first principles,

God's will, "*This is the will of God, even your sanctification.*" God wills that we should attain this standard. It is His will that we should "come unto the knowledge of the truth." It is not His will that any should perish; but this *will* should be remembered too. We are to be instructed that we may be saved, saved that we may be sanctified; nay, complete sanctification is only complete salvation. Lord, help us to realize our duty, to see how we "ought to walk and to please God."

II. The exhortation now becomes particular, and involves a SIN PROHIBITED.

It is sad to read in an Epistle like this, addressed to saints "in God the Father," such an admonition as that contained in verse 3, "*that ye should abstain from fornication.*" But we must remember the pit from which they had been digged, and that a similar command was sent forth, from the Council of Apostles and elders at Jerusalem, to all Gentile Churches. Alas, that to many professing Christians, the command should be needed still! It is a difficult matter to handle in a mixed congregation, but we may notice the reason St. Paul assigns for enforcing this command.

1. It is *dishonouring to man*. The man or woman who yields to the lust of the flesh does not "*know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.*" He cannot exercise the mastery over his desires, *they* possess *him*, not *he* them. This must not be; "every one of you," says St. Paul, "should know," and must avoid the dishonourable ignorance.

2. It is dishonouring, for it is a *mark of heathenism*,

"*even as the Gentiles.*" In many other systems this evil is pandered to, not merely permitted. You know how Mahometanism appeals to it, and promises a paradise of lust; you have read of the worship and rites of Venus. The orgies which disgraced Classical Heathendom, and the experience of modern Hinduism show how utterly impure these systems are. I can speak from experience of the adornment of the temple at Ramiserum, and the revolting pictures on the roof of its cloisters. "It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." With these unfruitful works of darkness the Thessalonians had *done*; none of them must now be practised, they must walk "*not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.*"

3. A third reason assigned is that *it is unbrotherly*; "*That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter.*" I follow those commentators who hold that Paul is here warning against the sin of impurity. Covetousness is, indeed, ranked by the Apostle with immorality, but the word *any* is, as you will see, in italics, and the verse should read '*in this matter*,' the matter of which he is writing. All sin is unbrotherly, it leaves marks of injury all round. But look at the wounds this sin gives, and see how they smart! Look at David! Not only could he not control himself, and sank to the level of "*the Gentiles which know not God,*" but, oh how he injured "*his brother*"!—Uriah, Ahitophel, his subjects, and generations then unborn! What a plea, how powerful, not to defraud the brother "*for whom Christ died*"!

4. A fourth reason for abstaining from immorality is *its danger*, "*Because that the Lord is the avenger of all such.*" As Paul told the Ephesians, no "unclean person" had "any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God," and his deeds brought on him the "wrath of God" (Eph. v. 5, 6). This, Paul had never hidden, "*We have also forewarned you and testified ;*" and it is owing to this that we have now the Christian home. Paul kept nothing back because it was unpalatable. He preached God's love in Christ with a full heart, and ready tongue ; but he could tell, and did tell, of God "the avenger" too. It is dangerous to vex Him.

5. A fifth reason is found in the fact, that yielding to the flesh is *deserting our colours*, "*God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*" He called us by His grace that we might be holy. These Thessalonians felt this, because they had turned from their dumb idols, and their filthy service, "to serve the living and true God," and now, were they to listen to sinful inclinations, they would be false to their call and impeding God's work in them. It is inconsistent.

6. There is still another reason. *It grieves the Holy Ghost.* It is possible some thought St. Paul strait-laced and too particular, and laughed at him. It is so, says the Apostle, he "*that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God.*" It is not me you are mocking, it is God ; that "*God Who has also given unto us His Holy Spirit.*" As this stands it is very strong, but a more probable reading makes it stronger still, '*Unto you.*' Having received such a gift, how great and grave the crime, how base and gross the ingratitude ! The same

unanswerable argument is put in more detail in 1 Cor. vi. 15-20. Any one of these reasons condemns the sin and the sinner. With what awful force the whole six clothe the apostolic "Abstain"!

III. The Apostle now proceeds to specify a POSITIVE DUTY.

In doing this he has to oppose a Divine Influence to a human instinct. Against self-indulgence he puts "*brotherly love.*" Here are bane and antidote. On this subject not only had his present teaching been anticipated, as we find it had in iii. 12, but his converts had learned the lesson from God Himself; "*As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*" As we saw last week, this love of the brethren is both the consequence and the sign of conversion. What a teacher! They were God-taught; and they had been apt scholars, "*Indeed,*" says Paul, "*ye do it.*" The duty, however, might be *extended*. The fire burned in too narrow a sphere. It did indeed extend "*toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia,*" and that was grand. They had recognised a brotherhood beyond their own families, and their own cities; but a wider field was claimed for its exercise, "*but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.*" They were to love the whole brotherhood; every Christian was to be in their hearts, and they were to have love to those who were "*without.*" Brotherly love is to "*continue*" as well as to *abound*. Let us take care that it does both. Let us have "*love one to another.*" Then do not let

our church walls be the boundary, let it spread and embrace other congregations and parishes. Neither let it be confined to our own Church, or withheld from those who follow not us. Let it go wherever Christ is and where His people are. Let it "*abound more and more.*" It is easy to love those who think and do like us. Submit the love to the strain of including those who differ from us, and then, like the disciples, who were told to pardon "until seventy times seven," we shall say, "Lord, increase *our faith*," the faith that works by love. This love is to be *exhibited*. Three ways are indicated.

1. The first is "*that ye study to be quiet.*" Love is "quiet." Such a word just befits the description in 1 Cor. xiii. 4-8. It tells how love works. But this phase is not attained without an effort; "Study," says the Apostle, or rather, '*make it your ambition*' to be quiet. Men's ambition leads them to covet and gain position, wealth, honour; empty things which perish so soon. Here is something which *they* think beneath their notice. It "never faileth." It is worth *your* ambition.

2. Another way of showing brotherly kindness is a singular one, "*To do your own business.*" There must be no ostentatious interference in other people's affairs. Love discerns the time to be silent as well as the time to speak; the "time to embrace" as well as the "time to refrain from embracing." In one sense, love minds its own business. That was, in fact, the command given by Incarnate Love, when John had forbidden the apparently unauthorized caster out of devils, when Judas and others murmured at what they deemed

the waste of good ointment, and when Peter inquired the future of the beloved disciple ; then, as also when curiosity wanted to know about Israel's future, Jesus said, 'Do your own business.'

3. Love was to show itself by being a burden to nobody. Love tells me to give ; but love tells me, if possible, not to have to receive. The converts are "*to work with your own hands.*" There was to be no idling. The caution was needed, for it is repeated in 2 Thess. iii. 11, 12 ; but it should not have been needed, for St. Paul says, "as we commanded you." Belief in an immediate Second Advent had unsettled them. Here love corrects faith. They had Paul's command and Paul's example too. He had done what he had told them to do (ii. 9).

The fruits of this love were twofold. The world described so sadly as "*them that are without*" was to see the Christians "*walking honestly* [with propriety] *toward them,*" and thus their attention and regard would be gained, and perhaps love would win them. Then the results to themselves would be good, "*that ye may have lack of nothing.*" God would bless their labour, and would supply all their need. Thus while selfishness impoverishes in addition to the sin and sorrow it causes, love enriches. "My God shall supply all your need."

Lecture XII.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."—1 THESS. iv. 13-18.

THE Apostle in this solemn and striking paragraph supplies one of the things 'lacking in the faith' of the Thessalonians. He, as we have seen, had shown them that their faith was defective because it did not sanctify their lives; and now proceeds to show how faith takes away the gloom and bitterness from death. Paul's preaching, as we have seen, when in Thessalonica, deals largely in the Kingship of the Lord Jesus, and in His return to this world. This teaching had sunk into the souls of the people, so that they not only turned from idols to serve God, but they adopted an attitude far too uncommon to believers, they "waited for His Son from heaven." While waiting,

some of their number died. Would they be losers by the fact that they were not on earth, and among the living Church, to greet their returning Lord? The Thessalonian Christians feared they would, and Paul sends this letter to add knowledge to what they already possessed; and shows that the state of the friends they had lost was a blessed state, and that every blessing they themselves hoped for would be enjoyed by them. The state of the dead, however, here spoken of is not that of *all* the dead. It is only that of those who "die in the Lord;" and the comfort here provided is confined to those who mourn such friends. How important then for each of us to seek a personal interest in Christ, that we may now be in Him, live in Him, and so fall asleep in Him too!

I. The first thing to be noticed here is **IGNORANCE DEPLORED.**

The Gospel is a foe to ignorance. The Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding heart. He has revealed to us great and precious truths, has put into our hands the key of knowledge. Superstition builds on ignorance; true religion builds on knowledge. A faith without knowledge is defective, reprehensible. But knowledge has its limits. The things which are revealed belong to us, but "the secret things" belong to God. It is vain to strive to be wise beyond what is written; presumption here punishes itself and makes a wise man a fool. God has told us what He intends us to know. What is hidden, will be revealed by-and-by when we are able to bear it. He desires not to satisfy curiosity, but to afford real help.

He gives the knowledge that 'builds up,' not the knowledge that 'puffs up;' so St. Paul says, "*I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren.*" The ignorance here spoken of was a common ignorance; it concerned the departed, "*concerning them which are asleep.*" He told his converts, however, not only about those who had died in faith, but (as the text might be rendered) concerning those that '*are falling asleep,*' and that last word is a revelation. Quite true that curiosity in this respect is not satisfied, our ears could not bear the whole story; but "*asleep*" tells much. It tells of life still remaining, though consciousness be suspended; it tells of rest, and foretells awakening. As this ignorance *occasioned sorrow*, it was needful that where possible it should be removed; they were to "*sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*" It is sad to read what the old sages and philosophers of Greece and Rome have written about the future state. The most hopeful had no hope worthy of the name. Immortality was at best a pleasing dream of the few. To others, death was an eternal sleep; and when once loved ones had been folded in the embrace of death, they were gone for ever. No wonder that they sorrowed. "No hope"! What a dismal description! Christians had a hope, a good hope; and if they sorrowed like the heathen, they sorrowed in culpable ignorance, for *ignorance forgets the faith*. Paul had told these Thessalonians what he had "first of all" told every other disciple, not only that Jesus died according to the Scriptures, but that He rose again. They had believed this, so he says, "*If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them*

also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." "Jesus died and rose." Those who are falling asleep merely drink of His cup, and they shall share His joy. Without any distinct revelation the sorrow should have been checked. Its cure was, "only believe," "*Jesus died.*" You will notice that to avoid the possibility of any wresting of his words Paul does not say Jesus *fell asleep*; that euphemism for death cannot be used in His case, a case of real, bitter, awful death, a death which destroyed death, and turned it into sleep for us. He "rose again," and there lies the proof of His victory, and the assurance of ours. There is here, too, a fresh consolation for those whose friends have passed away. They "sleep in" or rather '*through Jesus.*' They had only passed away with His consent and His permission, for He has the keys of death and Hades; and they had walked down the dark valley in His company. God shall bring them when Jesus comes. Their souls are with Him, and He shall have both soul and body for His sleeping ones when He returns. Ignorance brings sorrow, "Ye do err, not *knowing* the scriptures, nor the power of God." If we believe what has happened already, we may dry our eyes and trust God for the rest. The Head is in heaven, and the members shall be there; all there, too.

II. The next thing here is a REVELATION GIVEN.
"*This we say unto you by the word of the Lord.*"

"The word of the Lord" can hardly be merely the utterances of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, or unrecorded

sayings uttered in the great Forty Days; it must refer to some of "the abundance of the revelations" (2 Cor. xii. 7), vouchsafed to the Apostle on matters, when he went to his Lord for guidance (1 Cor. vii.). The Lord Jesus told Paul what followed for the comfort of His Church. You will see three things told here.

1. *Concerning the living.* His first word concerns them, "*We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord.*" So you see there will be living people when the Lord Jesus returns; the idea of a "last man" is sheer fancy. Who are these living people to be? Some tell us that in the company St. Paul expected to find himself; that is to say, that he was deceived himself, tried to deceive the Thessalonians, and was, above all, misled "by the word of the Lord." If this be so, he is found a false witness before God, and we are yet in our sins. But we have no need to indulge any such notions. St. Paul could not mean that he would be alive when Jesus came again. He was "in deaths oft," and that day and hour had not been revealed to him by the Lord, for Jesus our Mediator had not been commissioned to tell it. About himself he could not speak with certainty, nor about them. The "*we which are alive*" included Timothy, and Silas, and the saints in Thessalonica, who were falling asleep; and to narrow the "*we*" to the writers and readers instead of the whole body alive whenever Jesus comes, is to deal wrongly with the text. Only one Apostle knew for certain that he was to die—Peter—and that by death he was to "*glorify God*;" not only of John, but of all the rest it might be the case, that they must

tarry till the Lord came (St. John xxi. 19). Paul could not say he would be alive—for that would be telling what God had not revealed—nor could he say he would be dead, for that too was untold. This verse can therefore be no more quoted as an assertion that Paul believed he would be alive at the glorious appearing of Christ than that 2 Cor. iv. 14 (where he says, "He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus") is a proof that he would certainly die and be raised again. Paul left it where the Lord did, in doubt, and the "we which are alive" are the part of the one body which Jesus shall find when He returns. The only privilege those then living are to enjoy will be not dying; otherwise, they "*shall not prevent them which are asleep.*" To prevent meant, in the days of the translators, what the Latin equivalent means, to go before. "You may," says Professor Eadie, "go before one to help or hinder him; the latter being now so common an impulse in our poor fallen nature, the word has sunk into that sense exclusively." Still, in no sense at all shall the living get the advantage over the dead in "that day." If they have no dying experience, they have no dying grace. They neither sleep through Jesus, nor in Him.

2. The next thing revealed *concerns the Lord*. He is to come Himself. The judgment is not something done when the soul leaves the body, it is to take place on an actual day. The coming is real, "*The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven.*" He is to come in like manner as He was seen to go (Acts i. 11). The heavens, into which He has passed, are only to

retain Him till "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts iii. 20, 21). When He comes there will be three remarkable attendant phenomena. He is to descend "*with a shout.*" This is His own voice, not merely an exclamation; it is a word of command. In St. John v. 28 the Lord Jesus tells us that "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice," His shout. Recollect, it was by His word that He raised the little maid, the young man, and Lazarus; and these incidents help us to understand this "shout." Then there is to be "*the voice of the archangel.*" We only read of one Archangel in Scripture, even "Michael," in Jude 9; and there, as you see, the noun is singular. But as there are gradations in the heavenly host, writers have been led to follow Jewish tradition, and to speak of many Archangels (as in our Communion Service). What is his "voice"? We know that angels have much to do with the Second Coming. In St. Matt. xxv. 31 the Lord tells us that they accompany Him; in St. Matt. xiii. 41 He tells us that they are to "gather out of His kingdom all things that offend;" and it is possible that "the voice" here spoken of corresponds with the great "cry" at midnight, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," of St. Matt. xxv. 6. They herald His Second Coming as they did His First. And then there comes "*the trump of God.*" This mysterious sound no doubt represents the summons uttered to a troubled world; for the trumpet's sound was to prepare men for battle (1 Cor. xiv. 8). The Old Testament Scriptures refer to the trumpet summons in Isa. xxvii. 13, and Zech. ix. 14, while the woes of Rev. viii. are ushered in by seven trum-

pets. But this is distinct from all these. It is the "last trump" (1 Cor. xv. 52) ushering in the Last Day.

You will not fail to notice that these signs all appeal to the *ear*; thus they suppose a sleeping Church. If it were so then, how much more so now! Let us be among the watchers, among those who are "looking for Him," and thus get the first notice by the eye.

3. The next thing revealed *concerns the sleeping ones*, "*The dead in Christ shall rise first.*" There is no reference here to "the *first* Resurrection;" that is not mentioned here. The "*first*" here only means that, before anything is done to the living, the dead in Christ shall be attended to. "The dull, cold ear of death" shall hear, and the catacomb, graveyard, and cemetery shall be stirred. The sleeping ones are attended to first. Then they are joined by us, "*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them;*" 'Snatched' in haste, irresistibly, from danger, and duty, along with those rescued from the grave. They do not join *us*, we join them; "caught up together *with them in the clouds;*" those clouds which are His own chariot, the clouds which received Him when He went up Himself (Acts i. 9), and then all "*to meet the Lord in the air.*" He is coming, they are His friends; and, as Chrysostom remarks, they go to welcome and meet the Judge while the rest stay behind to be judged. The "air" will not be their *final* resting-place, for they are to be for "*ever with the Lord,*" and He will not stay there. There is a better place than that. But the Apostle says no more,

he gratifies no idle curiosity. We still know not after all "what we shall be;" and in the clouds, to which He conducts our wondering eyes, we must leave the rescued and exalted Church till the mist roll away for ever. There is one thing certain, we shall be not for a few happy seasons, not for months and years, but for "ever with the Lord."

III. THE DUTY ENFORCED is short and graphic.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

No sorrow without hope is ours; the Second Coming is full of comfort. That awful "*shout*"! It is the voice of the Beloved. That thrilling "*voice*"! It is the Archangel summoning the elect. That "*trump*"! It is the trumpet ushering in the year of Jubilee, reunion with those gone before, a meeting with Jesus! What a blessing!

"No gloomy fears [our] souls dismay,
His presence sheds eternal day
On those prepared to meet Him."

We need no mountains to fall, or rocks to cover. No, we lift up our heads and rejoice; our "redemption draweth nigh."



